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Marxian value theory and the 'crisis of measurability' a case study of work in the creative industries in the UK and the Netherlands

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**Marxian value theory and the 'crisis of measurability': a case study of
work in the creative industries in the UK and the Netherlands**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Social and Policy Sciences

November 2016

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ABSTRACT

This thesis critically analyses the conditions, social relations and practices that make measurement possible in the contemporary workplace. In so doing, it argues for the relevancy of Marx's theory of value to the study of contemporary labour. Using the latter, I stress the importance of measurement as means of relating what goes on in the workplace with what goes on in the market. I do so through a case study of work in the creative industries. I use an interpretation of Marx's theory of value to confront the empirical problem of how measurability persists where work is hard to quantify and commensurate. In so doing, I critique the postoperaist claim that immaterial labour precipitates a 'crisis of measurability'. In responding to this claim, I draw upon the New Reading of Marx and Open Marxism. Together, these suggest that the law of value relates to the abstraction of labour in the production and exchange of commodities, against the traditionalist labour theory of value which stresses labour's concrete expenditure. Secondly, they tell us that this abstract labour rests upon, practically and historically, a set of continuing antagonistic social relations of production. I employ these strands of Marxian theory to understand work in the creative industries. I interview workers in graphic design, branding and advertising agencies in the UK and Netherlands. The case study uncovers one principal means of measurement: billable hours. Against the difficulty of quantifying creative labour, the hours recorded seldom relate to the reality they claim to represent. Nonetheless, the measure to which they are subject brings into existence the measured, structuring how work is performed. What renewed strands of Marxian value theory show us is that measurability is imbricated less in direct labour than in relations that include the workplace only as their carrier: market-mediated social forms of commodity exchange and monetary value.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the last decade, Boehm and Land suggested that '[t]he question of measure has become a hotly debated topic amongst autonomist Marxists'. This debate centred on the claim 'that today's labour is 'beyond measure' or 'immeasurable' (2009, p.90). On one side were postoperaists like Hardt and Negri (2001, 2004), who argued that the rise of 'immaterial labour' (Lazzarato 1996) based on creativity, communication and cognition had sparked a 'crisis of measurability' simultaneous with a crisis in the law of value and the redundancy of the Marxian theory of value that conceptualises it. On the other were those autonomists like Caffentzis (2013) who argued for its persistence on the basis of a defence of the traditional labour theory of value.¹

In this thesis, I seek to do neither. I bring new theoretical and empirical resources to the understanding of what is at stake in this debate. The autonomist Marxist debates Boehm and Land recount from the time pre-existed the ascendancy of the New Reading of Marx (NRM), a revisionist reading of value theory based on new exegetical work on Marx's manuscripts. The NRM overhauls how we think about the relationship between value, labour and their measure, providing the tools to overcome any purported crisis of measurability associated with changes in the immediate form of labour.

Here I use this reading to decode the debate about measurability and offer new paths forward. I do so with reference to a case study of work in creative industries like graphic design, advertising and branding, an area identified by postoperaist theorists as the example *par excellence* of immaterial labour. As Boehm and Land recommend,

There is now a need to carry out detailed analyses of the metrics developed and deployed to measure value within the cultural and artistic sector. Furthermore, we see a need to study the impact of these discourses, metrics and control systems on the actual labour process of artists and cultural workers. In what way, one might ask, is their work really influenced by the new discourses and measures of value that have emerged over the past decade? (Boehm and Land 2009, p. 94)

It is such a research agenda to which this thesis responds. Existing approaches lack what it takes rise to this challenge. Mainstream management and organisational theory often posits the difficulty of measuring the value of creative labour, but, as Boehm and Land (2012, p.217) suggest, quoting Roy Jacques, seldom 'inquire[s] into what value is or how it is created'. Meanwhile, they contend (2012, p.218), Marx-derived theories such as that of the labour process school situate value squarely in certain forms of production, excluding those that do not fit a template of which creative industries fall foul. Neither offer an answer to the conundrum raised by autonomist Marxists about how changes in labour relate to capitalist measurement.

Through a renewed and critical Marxism, we can remedy both of these oversights, and in so doing find a way past the impasse of autonomist debates around the crises of measurability and the law of value to craft an account of why measurement still matters in contemporary capitalism. The thesis comes at a time where the uptake of postoperaist ideas in popular left 'postcapitalist' literature is gathering apace. The idea that capitalism can fall apart owing to a collapse in its capacity to capture value in existing frameworks of measure is the source of much wishful thinking. But rethinking value, labour and how they are measured, the NRM offers us thinking that is not wishful, but critical.

¹ This thesis critiques the former position; but a full critique of the latter can be found in Chapter 6.

I use this contemporary strand of Marxian thought to address the empirical problem of how measurement persists where work is hard to quantify and commensurate.² Via the case study, I critique the conditions, social relations and practices that make measurement possible in the contemporary workplace. I interviewed workers in graphic design, branding and advertising agencies in the UK and Netherlands. The interviews explore how workers experience abstraction, by which I mean the everyday awareness of the series of practical interventions staged by management to ensure work processes are measurable, commensurate and comparable. Through these, the practical character of the value abstraction in production makes it an object of experience that is researchable through participant testimony. In turn, the interviews interrogate how measurement abstracts from the concrete experience of creative work, by which I mean how the forms of measurement to which creative workers are subject in the labour process run contrary to the desire of these workers to create, and instead take on an objective external force compelling the creatives to conform to monetary principles and temporal rhythms subservient to capital rather than creativity. The interviews redeem participant experience from its abstraction, inviting participants to remember what measurement elides.

New directions in Marxian value theory

The thesis sits at the theoretical meeting point of two revisionist strands that challenge the traditional understanding of value, but in different ways. They lay divergent stresses on certain parts of Marx's output. In common, they reject the ideological monoliths erected of Marx's work in the last century. They emphasise instead what is unfinished, fragmentary and open to reconstruction. They do so distinctly, however. One cites empirical reasons for its specific and selective reading of Marx. The other does so exegetically.

The first is postoperaismo. In the Italian sixties and seventies, its forerunner, operaismo, focused on the factory as the locus of capitalist society. Postoperaismo, however, situated the factory in society as a whole. This theoretical switch was informed by an empirical understanding of changes afoot in production. They focused on the shift towards 'immaterial labour' (Lazzarato, 1996). This rises with the service sector, creative industries and so-called knowledge economy. Postoperaists brought this empirical understanding to a reading of Marx's *Grundrisse* (1993). The *Grundrisse* were a series of notebooks for what would later become *Capital* (1976). Their availability in English and Italian offered elements of an unorthodox Marx. Specifically, postoperaists seized on one part of the *Grundrisse*, the 'Fragment on Machines'. The scenario Marx paints in this led postoperaists to posit a crisis in the law of value his wider theory describes. Significantly, they use a revolutionary new Marx derived from long-unpublished notebooks to suggest his key theory's exhaustion. From the Fragment, they derive a vision of an incipient communism realised in the shell of capitalism. This vision, we shall see, wields political influence today. A new generation of postoperaist-inspired dreamers begin from the same few pages of Marx.

The second is the NRM, with which we can also associate a descendent, Open Marxism. Postoperaismo cites empirical reasons for its specific and selective reading of Marx. But the NRM takes an exegetical approach. It originates in Germany, around the same time as operaismo. Scholars under Adorno's tutelage began scrutinising Marx's published and unpublished manuscripts (Bellofiore and Riva, 2015). This close study showed the progression of Marx's value theory as it appears in *Capital*. Constantly revised and honed, in the procession of working drafts new complexities shone through. This exegesis extracts from the development of Marx's

² Elements of this introduction have been published as Pitts 2016a and 2016b.

work a reconstruction of his value theory. The central insight is that value relates not to expended concrete labour as in orthodox accounts. Rather, it relates to abstract labour. This is a category of social mediation expressed in money. It springs from the exchange of commodities by means of money in the sphere of circulation. Thus, for the NRM, the *Grundrisse* here plays a much lesser role than *Capital*. And there is less consideration of empirical factors than we find in postoperaist literature. Focus falls instead upon the general laws of how capitalism proceeds through a series of social forms.

Thus, both postoperaismo and the NRM radically challenge received Marxist wisdom around value. The former comes to bury it using the *Grundrisse* and new empirical facts. The latter, bearing the first volume of *Capital*, buries only one form of it- the labour theory of value (LTOV). In its place, it establishes an alternative 'value theory of labour' (Elson, 1979). On one hand, postoperaismo foretells the demise of the law of value and its theory. NRM, on the other hand, maintains their persistence, in radically rethought forms.

The two schools are seldom treated together. This thesis is an occasion to do so. The Marxological endeavour, inquiring into questions of value, labour, time and the links between them, is supported in the second part of the thesis by an empirical case study, consisting of interviews with participants working at the precipice of the changing world of work, without the concrete study of which the theoretical discussion in the first part of thesis would be no more than speculation.

The reason that the creative industries present such an exemplary forum for this work of Marxology is that they constitute a very different environment and set of problematics than the predominantly industrial context in which Marx's theorisations were initially hatched. A study of the creative industries helps in the process of selection motivated by the necessity to reconstruct Marx in the wake of new times, arguably shedding more light upon some of the things that Marx was trying to get at than did the industrial work processes with which his mature output was preoccupied. Bringing Marx to bear on the creative industries, and vice versa, stands as an original contribution to literatures on both the former and the latter as areas of academic inquiry. The creative industries provide perhaps the paradigmatic example of so-called immaterial labour. Not only do they reappear in the canonical writings on the topic, but they exhibit many of the characteristics associated with immaterial production. The application of a theory of value based not around the quantification of direct labour, but its social validation as abstract labour, to these industries promises good grounds from which to mount a critique of the mooted crisis of measurability opened up by immaterial labour, making possible an exploration of how measurability persists in creative work.

The rise of postoperaismo

Pressingly for the present time, my thesis tussles with the legacy of postoperaismo, specifically as it has been popularised by Negri and his theoretical inheritors. This year marks the fifteenth anniversary of the paperback publication of Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2001). *Empire* was 'academia's version of a blockbuster', described as a once-in-a-decade 'intellectual event' (Passavant and Dean, 2003, p.2). Its analysis of world power chimed with the tumult of globalisation. After the first run sold out, Harvard University Press hastily unleashed a mass-market paperback edition (Vuillamy, 2001). With *Multitude* (2004) and *Commonwealth* (2009), *Empire* came to constitute part of a loose trilogy, its arguments gaining new resonances as the decade progressed. The theorisation of 'multitude' as a political actor became a go-to idea for a generation of activists 'reared on their Hardt and Negri' (Mason 2011). *Empire's* release secured peak visibility for the rich tradition of Italian *postoperaismo*, sparking

a continuing debate about class, power, strategy and the changing face of labour at the commencement of the twenty-first century (Balakrishnan, 2003, Passavant and Dean, 2003).

Bringing to light Italian radical left discussions about 'immaterial labour' (Lazzarato 1996), it challenged conventional Marxist understandings of work in capitalist society. Importantly, it disputed the relevance of Marx's labour theory of value. However, as Kicillof and Starosta (2007, p.31, n.4) suggest, postoperaismo's autonomist lineage rarely addresses contemporary debates in Marxian value theory (for an instructive exchange see Kicillof and Starosta, 2007, 2011, Bonefeld 2010, 2011, Carchedi 2011). Although Hardt and Negri's 'rejection of the contemporary relevance of the law of value' implies dialogue, postoperaismo in the wake of *Empire* seldom engages with cutting-edge re-readings of Marx's value theory in the New Reading of Marx, and *vice versa*. This thesis seeks to bridge this divide.

The thesis takes as its starting point an argument posed by the postoperaists. Those making it include Antonio Negri, Carlo Vercellone and Christian Marazzi. The argument centres on the 'immaterial' character of contemporary labour. Immaterial labour, it contends, produces an immeasurable plenitude of value. This arises through the immanently self-organised cooperativity of labourers themselves. This takes place outside the confines of the capitalist working day. It happens spontaneously, without the need for capitalist imposition or control. Owing to this, the value it creates is beyond both capture and measure. This, postoperaists contend, creates a 'crisis of measurability' for capital. This crisis renders the law of value obsolete. By extension, it renders the theory of value Marx uses to understand it obsolete in turn.

What does it mean to be critical?

I contest this perspective using an approach derived from critical theory. What makes my approach critical? Whereas traditional theory 'presupposes what needs to be explained' (Bonefeld, 2016b, p.236)- society or economic categories, for instance- critical theory 'develops from actual, given relations of life the forms in which they have become apotheosized' (Marx, quoted by Bonefeld, 2016b, p.236). Bonefeld writes that Marx uses 'the critique of economic categories' in order to reveal 'their origin in the social relations of production', in hunger, violence etc. The distinction between traditional and critical theory impacts upon how we conceptualise the aims of research. It suggests that, instead of finding 'proof', the true commitment of critical research is to negate. Traditional theory 'analyses the empirical veracity of incomprehensible economic forces' (2016a, p.65). Critical theory, on the other hand, negates 'the whole sphere [they] move in' (Adorno, 1990, p.197). Rather than seeking positivistic 'proof' of hypotheses or the 'correct answer' to research questions, my approach seeks to engage in a negative critique of the economic objectivity assumed by social relations in capitalist society. The aim is to capture, by means of an analysis of appearances, the essence that, according to Hegel, 'must appear' in those appearances (Adorno, 1974). This is a critical and, crucially, dialectical operation, capable of dealing with a world outside proof, where things can be two things at once, and the true is a moment of the false and *vice versa*.

The means by which I unpick the appearances of economic objectivity is through a critical approach informed by the NRM, roughly comprising two strands. The first, including theorists like Michael Heinrich and Chris Arthur, takes the law of value to relate principally to the abstraction of labour in the production and exchange of commodities. This differs from the traditionalist labour theory of value (LTOV) which stresses labour's expenditure. The NRM generates theoretical resources with which to critique the postoperaist conceptualisation of a 'crisis of measurability'. It reveals that postoperaismo employs a traditionalist application of the LTOV only to refute it.

Postoperaismo has no conception of the process of abstraction by which labours enter into relation. Only by reducing Marxist value theory to the study of concrete labour and its measurement can it make the claim that the process it describes is in crisis. The second strand is Open Marxism, here represented in the work of Werner Bonefeld and John Holloway. This describes how abstract labour stems, practically and historically, from antagonistic social relations of production. This facilitates a critique of the intersecting portrayals in postoperaist and bourgeois accounts of creative labour as an unconflicted space of unburdened creativity.

Immaterial labour and the creative industries

The theoretical orientation is illustrated and supported with a case study scrutinising the claims made by postoperaists about the immaterial labour they see as hegemonic in contemporary capitalism. This is labour based around the manipulation of meaning, of affect, of symbols, of emotion, and dependent upon creativity, cognition, communication. This type of labour, because it breaks down the boundaries between work and life, and occupies all times of life itself, catalyses a crisis of measurability. This crisis of measurability renders obsolete what Marx described as the law of value and causes us to reassess how we apply the categories of Marx's theory of value. The crisis of measurability relates not only to the work carried out, but also the commodities, the specific kinds of goods and services, that are produced. They have an unknowability, an uncertainty attached to them, an ephemerality, that it shares with the labour itself. In order to interrogate these claims, I look at the archetypal example of immaterial labour: work in the creative industries, in fields like graphic design, advertising, branding.

The work that takes place in design and other creative industries possesses many of the characteristics of so-called 'immaterial labour'. It manipulates symbols and attaches meaning to goods and services in pursuit of commodity exchange. Due to its reliance upon ephemeral and unquantifiable qualities such as creativity, communication and cognition, theorists of immaterial production including Negri (2001) and Marazzi (2008) have suggested that this kind of labour and the value that it creates are essentially immeasurable. I suggest that postoperaist accounts of immaterial labour dovetail with bourgeois presentations of 'creative labour'. Both postoperaist and bourgeois theorists elide the persistence of class antagonism in the workplace. And both overlook, misunderstand or deny labour's implication in the process of capitalist valorisation. I return to this commonality in the conclusion.

To interrogate the claims made about immaterial labour with reference to work in the creative industries, I use interviews and fieldwork. Through interviews with creatives, I explore how their labour, and their experience of it, is abstracted from in being measured. Despite this abstraction, it is seen that attempts to measure and quantify labour, output and value continue to assume a concrete practical existence in the day-to-day monitoring of the time-use of workers.

It is this practical existence, the real character of the appearances of economic objectivity to which their work is subject, that make the second part of the thesis, whereby I support the theoretical speculations of the first part with empirical evidence, both possible and important for the future development of Marxian value theory.

Billable hours

The case study uncovers one principal means of measurement in the fields investigated: billable hours. Billable hours see jobs billed out to a client for a certain number of hours. Different hours of labour are valued differently and billed to clients on this basis. Clients are charged for a set number of working hours priced according

to whether the work is carried out by junior or middleweight designers and the specific content of the tasks involved in meeting the agreed brief.

My particular interest lies with two aspects. Firstly, the decisions made by accounts teams as to how hours are allocated and used, including the way in which these are negotiated with clients. Secondly, the way in which hours are recorded and logged by those working them. The research will allow me to explore the interactions at the different stages of the pricing process between employees and the devices and routines by which billable hours are negotiated, standardised, classified, quantified and performed.

More broadly, my interest lies with the way in which temporal frameworks help bring measure to ephemeral, immaterial labour practices whose productivity and value are not always easy to ascertain. The originality of my approach to this consists in its utilisation of qualitative techniques to investigate a quantitative process. Whereas quantitative business research would seek to give statistical evidence based upon the same numbers, valuations and measurements as those it seeks to study, the distinguishing feature of this project is that it would step away from this data to analyse it qualitatively, undermining the objective economic categorisations implicit in billable hours, rather than repeating the same reifying processes under examination. The practice of billable hours provides an exemplary arena in which such an elaboration can be pursued. Insights about billable hours can be extrapolated to question in a wider and more thorough way the particular form and function taken by the quantification and measurement of time in capitalist society.

Creative labour

What makes billable hours most interesting to me, however, is its use in specifically *creative* industries like graphic design, advertising and branding. With no materially measurable outcomes, creative industries struggle to bring to the work performed any such tentative, ideal measure of its potential productivity when the good or service rendered meets the market. Although the productivity and value of the labour performed is only fully expressed in the realm of exchange, I would argue, some early or ideal indication must be developed. Billable hours, the case study suggests, mark an attempt to bring some kind of rationale upon creative working practices, to manage and regulate them in such a way that both agency and client can conceptually locate the work that takes place as part of the social totality of commodity-producing labour. This struggle is simply something that takes an extreme form in creative industries, but is potentially theoretically significant for the analysis of capitalist economic activity more widely, especially in the context of a continuing state of economic uncertainty that, as we see in Chapter 8, feeds into certain imperatives driving the internal organisation of agencies towards a greater degree of accountability and standardisation, which play out in new forms and processes of measurement.

I employ the term ‘creative labour’ throughout, in spite of the apparent imprecision of the epithet, shared with the equally imperfect term ‘creative industries’. What the term ‘creative labour’ highlights, following Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011), is the status of work in the creative industries as a kind of *labour* still bound as a factor within the frameworks of capitalist valorisation, domination and exploitation the term implies, and not the immanently liberated free creation both mainstream and postoperaist accounts, as we shall see, would have us believe to be the case. The critical approach allows focus to fall on the dynamics of creative activity as a concrete expenditure of labour that is abstracted from in practice and experience owing to its imbrication in capitalist social relations of production and valorisation.

The New Reading of Marx and Open Marxism

The New Reading of Marx supplies the tools to perceive the practices and larger context in which this abstraction occurs. The NRM provides resources for the study of the unfolding process of social validation whereby abstract labour time productive of value is ideally and retrospectively conjured at various points of the circuit of capital, culminating in the successful exchange of the commodified good or service. This necessitates close attention to the movements of measurement, valuation and abstraction that take place as the concrete specificity of performed labour is abstracted from in the simultaneous constitution of both value and its measure, value-producing abstract labour-time. In this thesis I suggest that, whilst this process culminates in the successful sale of a good or service as a commodity, there are tentative points within the realm of production at which this abstraction reveals itself in an anticipatory form, before it assumes the guise of a real abstraction in society at large. And this is what makes possible the study of the set of practices which construct billable hours- the monitoring of time spent working on a particular project, the filling in of timesheets, the totting up of hours to establish what is left and what will be worked as overtime or unpaid- through the framework of social validation- as a series of points at which an anticipatory formulation of the eventual validation of these labours as abstract labour begins to cohere.

As we shall see, the case study supports the NRM-derived conceptualisation of why the abstractions constructed around labour-time within the labour process are necessary for various reasons. Following the accounts of Arthur (2013) and Sohn-Rethel (1978) surveyed in Chapter 2, the case study shows that the practical abstraction of one unit of measure- time- above all others enables agencies to complete several imperatives. It allows agencies and their investors and clients to compare like with like. It allows the commensuration of the creative work with other enterprises inside and outside the sector. It allows the rationalisation and restructuring of work and disciplining of workers. And it measures the speed with which a job is completed and the good or service it renders sent to market.

Open Marxism suggests how these processes connect with antagonistic relations of domination and resistance. By focusing on these antagonisms, the persistence of capitalist social relations in the new world of work is brought to light. This allows us to see creative labour as a site of struggle. Problematising it in this way disrupts its appropriation as a harbinger of a more pleasurable and enjoyable future world of work. It still remains subsumed within the antagonistic social relations of capitalist production. It is still beholden to the abstract economic compulsions of the social rule of value.

The thesis thus brings clarification to a crowded theoretical field. Marx's value theory has for some time struggled against its adherents. Weaponised for worker power, its analysis wavers. Traditionally, it has been taken to theorise the link between expended labour-time and surplus-value. The rendition goes something like this. Workers, with every hour, create value. Part of this is necessary for the worker. What is not, accrues as surplus to the capitalist. Read this way, it wielded a long but limited efficacy in mobilising workers politically. Or, at least, it falsely reassured them they were more powerful than they were in reality. Today, as we shall see, a new generation of Marxisant theorists make similar claims under a cloak of false anti-productivism. But, luckily, other Marxes are available. It is the contrast between two such competing visions of Marx and his work that I explore here.

My contribution

Within the literature on Marxian value theory, the PhD stands as a significant contribution in five ways. Firstly, it presents research steeped in the most

contemporary and radical re-readings of Marxian thought. My theoretical framework for looking at the topic is broadly informed by a critical approach to Marxian value theory. I bring together in critical reflection two contemporary schools of Marxian scholarship. On one side, value-form theory, incorporating the New Reading of Marx (NRM) and, to a lesser extent, Open Marxism. And, on the other, postoperaismo. They have seldom entered into dialogue. My emphasis, in bring them together in dissensus, is less upon a traditional 'labour' theory of value than upon the process by which different concrete labours are brought into a relationship of abstract equivalence with one another in the exchange of goods and services as commodities. Rather than focus purely upon the workplace as the arena in which value is determined, then, my research situates the determination of value on a continuum which culminates with its measure in the moment of exchange, the point at which a price is assigned to something. However, in viewing this as a continuum, the research attempts to explore the unfolding process of becoming by which practices and devices are set in place to bring this abstraction into real, objective form. It is primarily the portion of this process that takes place in the sphere of production that the research will be concerned with; however, in looking at this, the research will be outward-facing in thinking about the implication of what goes on inside design agencies within the wider circuit of capital. This marks a distinctive position with the tradition of Marxist social research.

Secondly, the research helps fill an absence of practical empirical qualitative research informed by value theory. Value, as a non-empirical reality, is an elusive topic of research. Marxists have traditionally been more comfortable conducting qualitative research into class conflict in the workplace or quantitative studies of the profit rate. This thesis is novel in that it takes the theoretical approach most attuned to this non-empirical character of the value relation and uses it to guide an empirical case study into how the practical abstraction inherent in the value-form is enacted and experienced in a concrete workplace setting. In Chapter 2, I show how the value-form can be conceptualised as a problem for social research to investigate, suggesting the 'modes of existence' it assumes as the correct object of study. The case studies show how this theorisation can inform a concrete qualitative inquiry. In doing this, I advance Marxian value theory, and specifically the NRM tradition, in the direction of applied social science research, showing how its concepts can be operationalized to comprehend everyday lived experience of life and work.

Thirdly, the thesis applies Marxian theory in order to understand work in the creative industries. This brings a focus on value, labour and antagonism lacking in much mainstream scholarship on this area and deficient even in more critical approaches such as that of the postoperaists disputed here. This opens up new critical avenues in the study of a much talked-about but under-theorised area of economic activity.

Fourthly, by looking at key areas of the so-called 'creative economy' - graphic design, advertising, branding, I demonstrate the relevancy of Marx's theory of value to the study of contemporary labour more widely. I stress the importance of measure as means of relating what goes on in the workplace and with what goes on in the market. This contributes to the renewal of Marx as the indispensable critical theorist of capitalist society for the 21st century as much as, if not more, than he was for the 20th.

And fifth, my critique opens out onto the future of work, inducing pessimism as to postcapitalist alternatives based on reduced working hours or a basic income. Creative lifestyles are often implicitly referenced in aspirations for these alternatives. They are cast as free, flexible, spontaneous and impulsive. A close study of the reality of creative industries work confounds these aspirations. I will expand on this point in the next section.

From postoperaismo to postcapitalism

In this, the study is motivated by the recent rise to prominence postoperaismo enjoys. It wields more influence on left political thinking than ever. This gives us cause to use the NRM as a sharp tool with which to cut through some of the wilful leaps of faith it makes. There is a pressing political necessity to once again uncover alternative ways of reading Marx. New orthodoxies have sprung up in place of the old, and postoperaismo is one.

More stimulating politically, postoperaismo has had a much longer Anglophone exposure than the NRM. It has filtered through into public discourse in a largely unspoken and often unknowing way. Postoperaist ideas weave themselves seamlessly into the fabric of left policymaking. Their popularisation in works such as Mason's *Postcapitalism* (2015b) and Srnicek and Williams' *Inventing the Future* (2015b) carries them from the radical fringe to the mainstream.

As I will show, this prospectus produces an impoverished analysis. But, more pressingly, it produces an impoverished politics. As Noys writes, 'theoretical interventions [...] also function [...] as forms of political practice' (2012, p.4). From wrong-headed philosophical illusions stem perverted and unsuccessful modes of praxis. This is important now. Many of the impetuses of this new politics are present in Negri. By critiquing the latter, they provide resources for critiquing the former.

Chapter outlines

In Chapter 1, I chart how, from a singular theory of value constituting a cornerstone of Marxist thought, today multiple and plural interpretations of this theory resemble shifting sands beneath it. The debate is complex, but strong polarisations may be derived from it that lend themselves to broad characterisations. This chapter maps these theoretical polarisations and the alternative positions of possible reconciliation that lie between them. First, the development of Marx's theory of value is surveyed. Second, its interpretations are grouped into two main overarching schools, traditional and value-form. The latter, it is suggested, presents a more satisfactory and consistent way forward for the Marxian theory of value. Tracing a tradition of thought stemming from the earlier work of I. I. Rubin, this section assesses the claim of the NRM for Marx's theory of value as an inherently monetary theory of value rather than the traditionalist 'labour' theory of value held by most orthodox interpretations of Marx's work.

Chapter 2 conceptualises Marxian value theory as a problem for social research to investigate. The chapter takes the positions developed in the previous chapters forward into a synthesis and reconceptualisation of value theory adequate to investigation through social research. It reflects upon how the theory of value developed might be taken as the basis of a programme of social research. It is argued that so conceptualised, value can only be encountered by the study of the 'totality of social relations' in capitalist society, inside the workplace and outside in the market. It thus suggests a way of conceptualising the theory of value as an object of research. It is contended that such research requires the study of the different 'modes of existence' that value takes over the course of the production of commodities and their circulation in society.

To clarify the object of study in a programme of research around questions of value, labour and abstraction, I draw on Werner Bonefeld's Open Marxist critique of the NRM to advance an interpretation whereby the abstract unfolding of value theorised by the NRM is rooted in antagonistic social relations of production. The combination of the NRM's monetary theory of value and Bonefeld's 'ad hominem critique of political economy' (2014, 2016a, 2016b) which sees the supersensible world of value through

the sensuousness of the actual conditions of life sharpens a double-edged critical sword with which to cut open postoperaist ideas around the redundancy of the law of value and the 'crisis of measurability' sparked by the advent of so-called 'immaterial labour' in Chapters 4-6. Locating processes of valorisation in concrete processes-practical abstractions around work and wage- I use the work of Chris Arthur to explore further the implications of Bonefeld's critique. Together, this furnishes us with basis to research value in applied social research. I explain how this approach feeds into a method based on accessing participant testimonies with semi-structured interviews, and the research design within which the case study is situated. I also describe the critical method by which I assay the postoperaist theory covered in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Chapter 3 sets out the epistemological and methodological underpinnings of the research, inspired by the 'negative dialectics of economic objectivity', and the method that follows. The NRM and its close cousin, Open Marxism, give us 'the critique of political economy as a critical theory of society'. This is opposed to the critique of political economy as an alternative economic theory that one can compare to that of, say, Smith or Ricardo. It rather takes the capitalist social totality as a whole as its object, including the economic categories the relations within this totality assume. This recasts Marx's critique of political economy not as an alternative economic theory, but a demystifying explosion of the objective economic forms specific to capitalism. It focuses, methodologically, on 'the negative dialectics of economic objectivity' (Bonefeld 2016a, 2016b). This demystifies a reality in which the results of human practice pose themselves above and against its performers. It explodes the economic abstractions through which humans subsist in capitalist society.

Moving to the critique of postoperaismo, Chapter 4 critiques the trajectory of Antonio Negri's work since the late 1970s. It identifies a shift from Marx to Spinoza as the source of a series of problematic positions. These relate to the understanding of the possibilities and production of change under capitalism. And they owe to the absence of a proper critique of political economy. My critique focuses on how Negri posits change as subject to the multitude's immanent relationship with global power. In so doing, he rejects dialectics, mediation and transcendence as analytical principles. Adopting the 'critique of political economy as a critical theory of society', I argue that these are necessary to grasp the continuing dominance of capitalist economic categories. Contrary to Negri, human practice is imbued not with any immanent, revolutionary positivity. Rather, its results are abstracted from and turned against us. The forms they assume, in value, money and commodities, dominate its doers. This negativity Negri's neo-Spinozism lacks. I take this negativity as an orientation to the study of creative labour in the second part of the thesis.

Chapter 5 critiques the purposes to which Marx's Fragment on Machines is put in postoperaist thought. Changes in labour lead proponents to posit a crisis of measurability and an incipient communism. I contest the postoperaist positing of the existing realisation of the Fragment. Postoperaists elide the persistence of the real abstraction of value, covered also in Chapter 6, and the social relations of production it expresses and proceeds through. I challenge the assertion that the crisis and redundancy of value associated with the Fragment is realised. This is because we still, in a contradictory way turned against us, subsist through the value-form. Where postoperaists see a 'communism of capital' (Beverungen, Murtola and Schwartz, 2013) already existing, I contend that we live, work, starve and suffer still under its rule. Our alternative strand of Marxist theorising brings its full horror home. But recognition of this negativity is necessary to develop the theoretical and practical tools to overcome it, conceptually and politically.

Chapter 6 critiques postoperaist conceptualisations of immaterial labour from the perspective of Marxian value-form theory. Critiquing the idea of the 'crisis of measurability' catalysed by immaterial labour and the contention that this makes redundant the law of value, it contests the novelty, immediate abstractness and immeasurable productivity postoperaists attribute to contemporary labour using the NRM. The chapter explores this theoretical conflict, asserting that postoperaismo refutes Marx's value theory only insofar as it holds a productivist understanding of value to begin with. The immaterial labour thesis brings into dispute only a traditional, orthodox labour theory of value. The conditions it describes leaves intact the abstract law of value by which capitalism operates. Theorists of immaterial labour are correct to say that the labour theory of value is redundant. Indeed, it was ever thus. Capital has always struggled in its attempts to render human labour productive against a 'crisis' of measurability. But it is abstract labour that enters into and sustains the social relationship of value, more so than that expended in the realm of production. Thus, capital has always faced the immateriality of the process of abstraction as a potential crisis of measurability. In this way, the existence of immaterial labour poses no threat to critical reinterpretations of value theory such as the NRM. An approach to value oriented around the 'social validation' of abstract labour places little importance on the possibility or impossibility of the quantification of working hours. This approach transcends the crisis of measurability posited in the postoperaist literature. It conceives of such a crisis as a permanent and in no way novel feature of valorisation.

Using this social validation perspective, Chapter 7 takes on postoperaist claims about work in the creative industries as an immeasurably productive form of immaterial labour. I contest the implicit judgements of productive and unproductive labour made by postoperaists such as Andrea Fumagalli on this point. This chapter considers the role played in the production of value by the labour that takes place in the 'sphere of circulation', like that which takes place in the creative industries studied here: graphic design, advertising and branding. It applies Heinrich's conceptualisation of 'social validation' (2012) to these sectors. This suggests that valorisation depends upon goods and services attaining commodity status by selling for money. Value is subject to this validation. The capitalist use of advertising, graphic design and branding guarantees the possibility of this validation. Using Heinrich, it re-evaluates claims made about the creative industries and cognate fields in three main respects. First, it exposes as inadequate certain Marxist understandings of productive and unproductive labour and the place of circulation activities within this distinction. Second, it refutes claims as to the immeasurability of immaterial labour and the redundancy of the law of value. Third, it suggests that creative industries possess a significant role in a capitalist economy blighted by a necessity towards the overproduction of commodities. I argue that these practices, traditionally seen as peripheral to the production of value, may actually be indispensable to it. This claim is based on a rereading of the discussion of productive and unproductive labour found in Marx's most direct treatment of the question of circulation work as 'the work of combustion' in *Capital* Volume 2.

Chapters 8-10 apply the theoretical discussion developed in the first part of the thesis to the empirical case study of work in the creative industries. Chapter 8 explores the contextual factors- sectoral, national and corporate- that impact upon the structure of work and measurement in the creative industries. Drawing on interviews with workers in graphic design, branding and advertising agencies in the UK and Netherlands, Chapters 9 and 10 give an in-depth account of how the dynamics of practical abstraction via work and measurement play out on the ground in these agencies. The case study uncovers one principal means of measurement in the fields investigated: billable hours. This is how jobs are priced and billed out to clients. But it also acts as an accounting mechanism internally. It structures the experience of work.

It disciplines workers through the constant completion of timesheets and monitoring by time-tracking software. These measures, participants suggest, seldom relate to the reality they claim to represent. No hour of labour is like any other. This is especially so in the differentiated and impulsive work carried out by the creatives involved in the study. But, nonetheless, the measure to which they are subject brings into existence the measured. It defines a smooth quantitative space wherein the differences between hours and tasks disappear. The participant interviews aim at recovering what disappears in this space. They bring focus to what is forgotten and denied when concrete experience is abstracted from in measurement and quantification: desire, spontaneity, antagonism.

I conclude by linking this analysis into a wider challenge to currently popular ideas around technology and the future of work as they relate to the creative industries. Postoperaist accounts cite creative industries as exemplars of immaterial labour. They suggest its spontaneous, autonomous creativity causes a crisis in measurability. Today, this vision inspires visions of a postcapitalist or postwork future incipient within the present. Creative industries epitomise technological transformations on which the future is said to hinge. But the ascription of these powers to work in the creative industries misunderstands their continuing status within frameworks of capitalist valorisation, domination and exploitation. I suggest no utopia attends them. The optimistic 'postcapitalist' perspective rests on a misunderstanding of where value comes from, and what the relationship is between the economic activity that takes place in production and the abstract forms of economic objectivity this creativity results in. The critical Marxist account given here opposes the liberatory narratives presented in mainstream accounts of the rise of the creative industries and the impulses of self-actualisation they are taken to reflect. It also opposes the resonant discourses present in postoperaist accounts and their modern proponents, which envision a world of work in which a creative multitude self-actualises unencumbered by the capitalistic demands of industrial factory labour. Postoperaist accounts of immaterial labour's liberatory potential, when applied to work in the creative industries, dovetail with mainstream accounts of changing capitalism. Addressing my work to this context, I close by critiquing utopian visions that see in creative or immaterial labour a template. In its current form, whatever potential it possesses exists only in denial. Struggle must ensue to recapture creative work from this. Ultimately, I conclude, capitalist development will not deliver us utopia. Critical thinking, and not wishful thinking, is our only resource.

1. INTERPRETATIONS OF MARX'S THEORY OF VALUE

1.1. Introduction

In the following, I will seek to outline some of the ways in which Marx's labour theory of value has been interpreted in the Marxist tradition.³ One might restrict a chapter on the theory of value simply to the presentation of a patchwork of the thoughts of Marx himself on the topic. However, Marx's work on the question of labour and value contains interlaced ambiguities which lend themselves well to varying interpretations, each with its own arsenal of quotations and passages to confirm its position.

Following Marx's advice that one can best understand the ape from the vantage point of its highest stage of development in the human being, Riccardo Bellofiore suggests that such a rule applies equally to reading Marx's oeuvre: *'the most developed is the key for the knowledge of the less developed'* (2009, p.179). As such, in the three volumes of *Capital* (Marx, 1976, 1981, 1992), one gains the greatest sense of the ultimate resolution of his life's thought. It is upon these texts that the foregoing discussion will be based, although its details and ambiguities will often be paraphrased through the words and ideas of thinkers following Marx. It is this theoretical ventriloquism which allows the chapter to accommodate the numerous possible readings of Marx. As Alfredo Saad-Filho writes of his own approach to Marx's work, selected quotations and evidence from Marx's output are given second place to the presentation and critique of 'other readings of his works' which 'may illuminate certain problems from different angles' (1997, p.458). In the context of the internecine struggle between competing conceptions of Marx's thought, an approach claiming to be presenting his opinions and nothing else would only constitute the taking of one position or another in that struggle. The uncovering of numerous manuscripts, tentative notes and unpublished works have only served to reveal that Marx's project was a mere 'fragment' of what was possible, and has exposed 'Marxian theory as a radically open project' (Endnotes, 2010). It is this radical openness that allows us to be free of constant reservations based upon what Marx did and did not say on this or that issue, and to move the debate forward into virgin areas of investigation and critique whilst still remaining in a rich and multifaceted Marxist paradigm.

Far from its typical representation as a strictly 'labour' theory of value, monolithic, scientific and assured of its essential status in the intellectual repertoire of those situated in the Marxist tradition, it is subject to considerable critical dispute. This chapter maps the theoretical polarisations at play and the alternative positions of possible reconciliation that lie between them. The presentation of Marx's theory of value will open up into an outline and critique of the principal positions taken on value theory in the subsequent literature in the Marxist tradition. Plotting a spectrum of approaches, from the 'embodied labour' thesis of traditional Marxism to the exchange-oriented perspective of value-form analysis, the discussion will focus chiefly upon the way in which the debate has been split along the lines of allegiance to either production or circulation as the means by which the determination of value can be explained.

Responding to the internecine debate represented in the spectrum of interpretations of Marx's theory of value, Heinrich poses the question: 'A Production or Circulation Theory of Value?' His answer is neither, and both; indeed, the question itself is revealed to be senseless, subject to a false choice (2012, pp.53-55). Heinrich depicts as nonsensical the dispute over whether production or circulation ultimately determines the creation of value. As he asserts, '[v]alue isn't just "there" after being

³ This introduction draws upon revised elements of an unpublished MRes dissertation (Pitts 2012)

“produced” someplace’, but is a ‘social relationship [...] constituted in production *and* circulation, so that the “either/or” question is senseless’ (2012, p.54). Thus, rather than placing the object of its analyses squarely within either production or circulation, it situates itself in the circuit of capital as a whole.

Following Heinrich’s response (2012) to the production-circulation divide in explanations of value, my interpretation is structured by an approach informed by the New Reading of Marx (NRM), the main proponent of which covered here being Michael Heinrich. This is largely about where in Marx’s work one places emphasis, rather than a ‘correct’ interpretation. By outlining the monetary emphasis of the NRM’s take on value theory, I will go deeper into the significance of ‘social validation’ for my understanding of the relationship between labour, time and value. I will use the work of Bellofiore to root this in an overarching ‘monetary’ theory of value, and the work of Arthur and Sohn-Rethel to understand the relevance of time for the study of value in the workplace. The NRM, it is suggested, presents a more satisfactory and consistent way forward for the Marxian theory of value.

The theory of value with which I proceed draws upon work by Marxian theoreticians such as Riccardo Bellofiore (2009), Werner Bonefeld (2010) and Michael Heinrich (2012).⁴ These thinkers broadly coalesce under the banner of the NRM, and can be described as holding a broadly ‘monetary’ theory of value (Fuchs, 2014, pp.40-41). Inspired by the readings of Marx given in the work of I. I. Rubin (1972), the NRM originated in the work of Helmut Reichelt (2005) and Hans-Georg Backhaus (1992, 2005). Working from a careful reinterpretation of Marx’s written output, the NRM inflects its reading of Marx with Frankfurt School social theory derived from the work of Adorno, under which many of its earliest exponents studied (Bellofiore and Riva, 2015). The critique of political economy is thus read as a critical theory of society rather than an alternative economics per se (Bonefeld, 2014). It presents ‘a Marxism stripped of dogmatic certainties and naturalistic conceptions of society (Bonefeld 2014, pp.41-2).

Thinkers associated with the NRM share an anti-substantialist approach to the theory of value that stresses the importance of abstraction and social validation. This has two aspects, according to Christian Lotz. The first is that, in the words of Marx, ‘the value form must be a socially valid form’ (Marx, quoted in Lotz, 2014, p.38, author’s translation). By extension of the first, the second is Arthur’s contention that ‘[v]alue has a purely social reality’ (Arthur, quoted in Lotz, 2014, p. 38). Lotz suggests that this is a key shared point of agreement and identification among thinkers associated with the NRM (Lotz, 2014, p.69, n.21).

The theory of value I derive from the NRM proceeds as follows. To exchange as commodities, products of labour (whether goods or services) must have some kind of value on the basis of which they can relate with one another. This provides a metric for decisions about what quantity things can exchange in and for. But the labours specific to each good or service are heterogeneous and incomparable. Thus, the *concrete* specificity of individual labours must be *abstracted from*. This abstraction irons out the differences. It generates pure, undifferentiated homogeneous ‘amounts’ of labour. This then provides the grounds for like-for-like comparison. This undifferentiated labour is *abstract* labour. It is because of this that a good or service exchanges with other goods and services by means of money, attaining the status of a commodity.

⁴ Elements of this section have been published as Pitts 2015a, 2016a and 2016b. Other elements appeared in an earlier form in an unpublished MRes dissertation (Pitts, 2012).

Abstract labour does not so much take place itself, as come about by means of an invention. The process of abstraction by which this occurs stems from the concrete, private nature of performed labour. It is this latter labour that *does* take place in capitalist society. It becomes social and abstract only after its expenditure. First, a product of labour is confirmed as a commodity possessing value and exchangeability. Only then is the concrete labour-time that went into its production *validated* as a part of the total abstract labour time of society. It passes as *productive* labour that has helped bestow value upon a good or service. The good or service can then stand as a commodity in a relationship of equivalence and commensurability with the other commodities of the market. This unfolds by means of money. Marx (1861-63) writes that '[a] singer who sells her singing on her own is an unproductive worker, but the same singer when hired by an entrepreneur to sing in order to make money is a productive worker because she produces capital.' Thus, the singer may sing like a songbird with or without the capitalist turning her songs to profit. Whatever the exact nature of the end result of her labours, the essential task remains the same. But it is only when the capitalist exchanges her songs or performances for money that her labour becomes productive, properly capitalist labour. Thus, we may say that value productivity is determined in exchange.

Following this, I suggest that value does not consist in the amount of labour-time expended in production by any one labouring individual. It relates to the amount of time 'socially required for its production' (Marx, 1976, p.301). This is subject to a validation made after the concrete expenditure of labour. It is only through this validation that labour can be said to produce any value at all (Bonefeld, 2010, pp.266-7). We will deal with social validation later in the chapter.

1.2. Outline of Marx's Theory of Value

In *Capital*, Marx counsels against situating value in the sheer amount of labour expended in a commodity's production. He notes that if this were the case then the commodity with the most value would be that produced by the most 'unskilful and lazy' worker. The labour-time that determines value is instead that *socially-necessary* (Marx, 1976, p.129). Value exists, according to Marx, only as 'definite masses of crystallised labour time' (1976, p.184). The emphasis here is upon the crystallisation by which this can be said to be so- and not upon any amount of actual concrete labour in time. Hence, value relates to abstract labour and not its concrete expenditure (Bonefeld, 2010, p.262). Thus, as we shall see in Chapter 6, any putative crisis of measurability based upon the latter is thus shown to be mistaken. The case study, specifically in Chapters 9 and 10, demonstrates that it is an abstract measure of 'time taken' (Arthur 2013) that capital extracts as the socially significant datum of value production, expressed finally in monetary terms- and not the direct expenditure of the concrete labour from which it abstracts, as implied in the postoperaist treatment of Marx's theory of value critiqued in Chapters 5 and 6.

In a footnote in *Capital* (1976, p.188), Marx dispenses with the illusion that value relates to expended labour-time. The footnote envisions a national database logging the labour-time expended in commodity production. Individual contributions are calculated and recompensed in the form of a labour certificate. Marx critiques the scheme for its assumed comparison of like-for-like products of social labour-time. For Marx, the labour-time does not become social in production. It becomes social only in and through commodity exchange. As Elson writes, 'the labour-time that can be directly measured in capitalist economies in terms of hours...is not the aspect objectified as value, which is its social and abstract aspect' (1979, p.136).

From this perspective, the main matter facing explanation in Marx's theorisation is the way in which exchange is organized through the bringing of different concrete labours

and the use-values they create into a relationship of equivalence which allows their commensurability and interchangeability on the market. In a nutshell- the process by which the content of labour should result in a specific social *form*.

The LTOV is the means by which Marx attempts such an explanation. Outlining his method, Marx remarks that '[i]t is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers- a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity- which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure' (1981, p.791). To apply this method to capitalist societies requires that one begins from that which is specific to them. This specific feature is the commodity. Rather than track back to find the origins of the form, Marx instead sought to delve deeper *inside* the form beneath its immediate appearance (Elson, 1979, p.142). Following this method, and beginning from the commodity as the most immediately apparent distinguishing feature of the capitalist system, Marx sets out from the proposition that the commodity has a dual character. Marx proceeds to split the commodity 'into two aspects, use value and exchange-value; further examining exchange-value, as a historically specific form of exchange relation, and establishing what this form of appearance must presuppose as a product of a socio-historical process.' (1979, p.160).

Commodities are defined as 'use values produced by labour for exchange' (Fine and Saad-Filho, 2004, pp.18-19). In every society, the products of labour can be said to possess a certain amount of use value, whether this be food to be eaten, a coat to keep us from the cold, or education and healthcare to ensure our continued and prosperous existence. However, noting the way in which capitalist society is defined by the production, exchange and accumulation of commodities on a grand scale, Marx is provoked to move beyond the simplistic portrait of the products of labour as items of use. It is *exchange* value that provides the basis of the ability of one commodity owner to trade the commodity he or she owns for another, constituting and embodying a relationship of equivalence and interchangeability (2004, pp.15-17).

In order to be exchanged, commodities must be brought into such a relationship so that two different commodities with different use-values can be compared in a like-for-like way. This equivalence is not merely established in the *individual* act of exchange. The examples used by Marx, such as that of the exchange of corn and iron, should be taken not as an indication that exchange so described refers to the individual act of trading corn for iron, but rather the 'whole process of exchange from which this one example has been abstracted' (Elson, 1979, p.152). Chris Arthur sums this up well when he writes of the almost infinite interchangeability of all commodities with one another, an interchangeability from which no individual commodity can be isolated and allowed to stand on its own specific value (1979, pp.67-81).

Equivalence is achieved through a social process encapsulating the individual exchanges of the totality of social actors, without any reference to 'rational social convention' (Elson, 1979, p.154). Where Smith attributed valuation and market exchange to what Heinrich (2012, pp.45-47) describes as the '*rational considerations* of isolated individuals', Marx displayed a marked incredulity towards the individual thought processes of market actors, preferring instead to concentrate his analysis upon the set of social relations specific to capitalism in which social agents insert themselves. The values expressed in exchange have nothing to do with the fancies or determinations of those involved. There might, at first glance, seem to be some convergence between form approaches to value and marginalist accounts of valuation. But here the difference is clear. Rather than speaking of the buying and selling of commodities through the example a single act of exchange through which these subjective elements might be assessed, as does Smith, Marx instead deals with

the entire totality of social relations in which exchange takes place. It is this totalising viewpoint which allows Marx to explore the way that the social organisation of labour within capitalist society is geared towards the commensuration of distinct labours in service of commodity exchange. Value theory is therefore principally an attempt to explain 'the specific social character of commodity-producing labour' (Heinrich, 2012, pp.45-47); again: why and how a content should take a certain form. This question guides the case study that illustrates my theoretical analysis in Chapters 8, 9 and 10, enquiring into precisely how and why creative labour has abstracted from it certain forms of measure.

In this sense, the equivalence of exchange constitutes an appearance which Marx seeks to dig deeper down into in order to unmask the network of economic and social relations underlying it. Once the equivalence of exchange is established as the necessary condition for the capitalist market economy, Marx turns towards the question as to what makes this equivalence possible. Similarly, this thesis, in the case study in the second part, not only seek to explain the specific appearances taken by the objective economic forms assumed by creative labour, but also the concrete material practices and relations that potentiate and sustain them.

How does Marx trace this possibility? The common element that all commodities possess is that they are the products of labour. This labour is criss-crossed and differentiated by the division of labour, which separates out working tasks, trades and distinct labour processes in the production of different commodities. Due to this division of labour, the products created need to be reconciled with one another in order to be exchanged. Different concrete labours, which bestow upon commodities their individual and specific use-values, must therefore be mediated and measured as human labour in general in order to constitute a common basis upon which distinct commodities can be traded. The undifferentiated, homogeneous representation of distinct concrete labours so established is an *abstraction* from each of the specific practices involved in the production of individual commodities and use-value. Therefore, the dual character of the commodity is mirrored in the dual character of labour. Where concrete labour determines use value, it is *abstract* labour that forms the substance of exchange value.

This translation of concrete labours into abstract can also be thought of in terms of individual and social labour (Kay, 1979, p.56). In capitalist society individually performed concrete labour can be said to produce commodities through its existence as abstract social labour. On the principle that all labour occupies time, this 'human labour in general' can best be measured with recourse to labour-time (Fine and Saad-Filho 2004, pp.19-20). However, it is not the individual expenditure of labour-time which is measured in the exchange relation. Rather, what determines value is the *socially necessary labour-time* (SNLT), which Marx defined as 'the labour-time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society' (1976, p.129).

This SNLT is represented in the *money form*. Elson (1979, p.139) notes that in the various equations contained within the pages of *Capital*, Marx never attempts to substantiate the value of a commodity with any figures drawn from labour-time. Rather, everything is presented through the numerical prism of money. The practical way in which the totality of individual exchanges previously described gives rise to an accidental, unplanned equivalence relies upon the role of money as a reference point for the equivalence of all commodities as parts of the social totality, an objective form of value to which all commodities can bear comparison and on the basis of which they can attain commensurability. In capitalist society, through 'social custom', this form of

value- which becomes the universal equivalent- is money (Heinrich, 2012, pp.59-61; Marx, 1976, pp.180-1).

In order for money to act as the universal equivalent, it must be 'directly exchangeable' (Marx, 1976, p.147) on a basis unconnected to its individual use value or the actual concrete labour expended in its production. This sets it apart from the other commodities with which it is exchanged. Its exchangeability arises not from its use-value but from its 'social position as equivalent' (Elson, 1979, p.162). This social position comes about through the totality of exchanges, as Marx puts it 'the joint contribution of the whole world of commodities' (Marx, 1976, p.159, p.180). The specific role of money as the equivalent in capitalism 'crystallises out of the process of exchange' rather than by agreement (1976, p.181, Elson, 1979, p.163). As Heinrich asserts, commodity owners by their very activity as such bring about money through necessity (2012, p.63). Indeed, exchange could not take place without it. However, it is important to remember that money is not in and of itself the key component, but acts only as an expression of abstract labour and SNLT (2012, p.64).

It is in this sense that we can attribute to Marx a *monetary* theory of value that moves beyond the *pre-monetary* theories that preceded it (Heinrich, 2012, pp.63-4). The debate about just how 'monetary' the Marxian theory of value is or should be is one which forms a central crux of the competing conceptualisations that have followed in the Marxist tradition, which we will now consider. The debate centres upon the distinction between the spheres of production and circulation. The sphere of production is where labour is expended in the production of commodities, and the sphere of circulation is where these commodities are exchanged. Whether one believes that value is determined in the former as an expression of actually expended labour, or in the latter where value constitutes a kind of 'social validation' which registers different concrete labours as abstract and the labour-time in which they were expended socially necessary, forms the key distinguishing feature of the different characterisations of Marx's theory of value.

1.3. From Traditional Marxism and Value-Form Theory

Alfredo Saad-Filho follows Philip Mirowski in differentiating between two contradictory versions of the theory of value in Marx.⁵ In the first, the *crystallised-labour* or *substance* approach, 'labour-time is extracted in production and buried in the commodity, where it subsists independent of any market activity until the commodity is consumed.' This approach is utilized by Marx to emphasize his point that exchange is not wholly responsible for value, and that labour matters too. This attention to labour plays itself out in Marx's preoccupation with exploitation. The second version of value theory in Marx is what Saad-Filho, following Mirowski, calls the *real-cost* or *virtual* approach. Here, value is determined by a '(changing) configuration' of production and circulation (Saad-Filho, 1997, p.457). From this ambiguity can be extrapolated two central strands of Marxian thought each with a competing interpretation of Marx's theory of value. The substance/virtual divide described by Mirowski corresponds to the distinction between traditional Marxism and value-form theories (Saad-Filho, 2002). It is on the basis of this distinction that we will discuss the spectrum of positions occupied in the debate about labour and value.

Until the 1970s a 'Ricardian' consensus dominated the understanding of Marx's theory of value. This is best exemplified in what is known as the 'embodied labour' approach to the theory of value, which posits that value is determined by labour embodied in commodities during production. In the traditional interpretation of

⁵ This section draws upon, in revised form, elements of an unpublished dissertation (Pitts 2012) completed in the MRes component of the doctoral training.

Marxism, Marx's economic theory is considered to differ little from that of Ricardo. The main focus of Marx's theory of value is held to be exploitation rather than exchange, with commodities, money and value purely incidental to this central preoccupation. Value is incorporated only as a means by which the rate of exploitation can be determined. This leads to a concern purely with the *magnitude* of value as represented in the 'amount' of abstract labour congealed in a commodity, rather than the substance or form of value in the shape of money. Concrete labour and abstract labour are treated as separate and in opposition with one another. So too are their attendant values, use-value and exchange-value (Saad-Filho, 1997, p.459).

Such a perspective relies upon a reading of *Capital* whereby the first three chapters on commodities, value and money are portrayed as referring to a system of exchange that exceeds capitalism alone. It is suggested that it is only in chapter four that *Capital* deals directly with capitalism, whereupon Marx begins to deal with surplus-value and exploitation. Saad-Filho suggests that this exposes a severe misunderstanding of Marx's method in *Capital*, whereby he proceeds from the 'cell-form' of the capitalist mode of production he wishes to study. This 'cell-form' is the commodity, from which are extrapolated successive new stages of understanding relating to exchange, value, the money form and abstract labour. This is an attempt to begin with the concrete in order to 'achieve a systematic and consistent reconstruction of reality in thought.' For Saad-Filho, whether or not the matters investigated in the first three chapters of *Capital* have existed for aeons, Marx's treatment deals only with their reality as facts of *capitalism* specifically. Therefore, all categories used in his analysis are specific to capitalism (1997, pp.460-1).

Marx's critique of Ricardo points us towards the importance of a value form analysis. Traditional Marxism makes the same mistake that Marx alleged of Ricardo, namely the complete ignorance of the realm of circulation. Ricardo was unable to conceive properly the nexus of money and commodities and therefore understand the relationship between value and abstract labour. Ricardo never stopped to question the relationship between labour, its duration and value, prohibiting him from the consideration of the 'form' that labour takes in determining exchange value- its specifically *capitalist* form. Ricardian Marxists therefore follow Ricardo in 'taking the mode of labour for granted' (Saad-Filho, 1997, p.460). What can broadly be labelled the *physiological* approach deepens the transhistorical treatment of labour and value found in Ricardian accounts. This approach argues that 'capitalist social forms can be traced back to some natural basis, which however does not exist in pure natural form'; rather, it 'always subsists through distinct modes of production.' Ultimately, it sees 'capitalist social relations as developed nature.' It is towards this analysis of the 'historical specificity of the capitalist mode of production' (Bonefeld, 2010, p.242) that value form analysis is directed.

In the 1970s, the Ricardian consensus was challenged by such a focus on the 'the *historical specificity*' of the value form (Kicillof and Starosta, 2007, p.13). Where the earlier paradigm saw prices as determined by their labour content, value form theories saw prices as determined by the 'social validation' of labour in the marketplace (Kicillof and Starosta, 2007, n.1, p.30). At the extreme end of responses against traditional Marxism has been the circulationist approach that originated in the work of I. I. Rubin (1972). Here, the reality of abstract labour and value is held to be constituted solely through the exchange of commodities for money. Removing the determination of value from the 'objectification of productive activity' and into a separate realm of pure exchange and circulation circumvents the possibility of lapsing into the Ricardian labour-content analysis (Kicillof and Starosta, 2007, p.14).

Where the Ricardian 'embodied labour' approach places emphasis upon the quantitative magnitude of value whilst neglecting completely the money-form, the

circulationist approach possesses an essentially *qualitative* appreciation focused specifically upon 'the commodity moment' and the form of value involved (money) and its relationship with production through the conduit of abstract labour. Rubin emphasized the specifically commodity-oriented characteristic of capitalism to the extent that he referred to the subject of his analysis as 'commodity-capitalism'. Rubin posited that producers are subject to a need to render the commodity they produce 'socially useful' so that it can be sold on the market. This 'imperative to sell' has been labelled the 'monetary constraint', whereby private and concrete labours are only, 'at best', 'potentially or only ideally abstract and social. Private and concrete labour is converted into social and abstract labour if and when its product is exchanged for money' (Saad-Filho, 2002, p.26). Important here is the idea that private labours are only 'at best', 'potentially' abstract and social. This is as against those perspectives which argue that the abstract side of labour is always present in the expenditure that takes place in the production process proper.

As Saad-Filho notes, such an account of abstract labour 'correctly restricts the concept to commodity societies', rather than eternalising it as a natural category, by virtue of the fact that here it only comes about through validation in market exchange. However, Saad-Filho is ultimately critical of such a perspective. As he points out, the abstract labour approach refutes the dual character of labour as the *simultaneously* concrete *and* abstract quality of labour in favour of a dual character which is staggered, with labour only becoming abstract 'when its product is exchanged for money'. Although numbering among those sceptical of accounts of value that foreground the sphere of circulation in their analyses, Saad-Filho (1997, pp.465-466) commends the way in which such a perspective emphasizes the necessary appreciation of the role of money in value analysis, counselling against an analysis informed purely from the vantage point of production.

As Saad-Filho notes, money is important in that economies of commodity exchange could not exist without it, and through price forms the only means by which value can appear and be expressed. Riccardo Bellofiore is perhaps the principal proponent of a specifically monetary, or 'circuitist' (2009, p.191), paradigm of NRM value theory. He suggests that this moniker refers to the way in which the determination of value is considered to be subject to a process located within the entire circuit of production and circulation. Money is taken to be the element which unites this process. Therefore, the circuitist approach can also be seen as an extension and reformulation of the 'monetary theory of value' of the circulationist approach. The circuitist position holds that value is determined not solely in production, but through the social validation of expended labour, which takes place in circulation. There the one cannot be said to possess any determination without the other, with production and circulation consisting as 'moments of a whole' (Clarke, 1980, p.9). This whole is the capitalist circuit.

Bellofiore's account is distinguished by its attempt to reconcile the divide between theories of exploitation and theories of value that has opened up on the terrain of the debate over whether production- or circulation-oriented interpretations stay truest to Marx's original work. Bellofiore criticizes exchange-oriented versions of the theory of value for a '*total evacuation of labour*'. He states his aim to reinstate labour into such versions (which include that of Rubin and his followers) whilst simultaneously reinstating the exchange abstraction into production. The way that Bellofiore sets about this is by positing the existence of a 'monetary *ante-validation*' predating the production process, which renders everything that takes place subsequently '*tentatively social*'. This relies upon a conceptualisation of the capitalist circuit as an 'essentially *monetary*' one, with '*bank finance to production*' as its origin and basis (2009, p.184).

In the sense that money is the form in which abstract labour is represented, it is on the basis of abstract labour that Bellofiore seeks to 'unite' production and circulation. Abstract labour is both '*presupposed*' and '*actualized*' within the act of exchange. The reason that commodities are exchanged for money, for Marx, is that they already possess some aspect of commensurability. However, Bellofiore does not follow so-called 'embodied-labour' theorists of value in attributing this commensurability to an abstract labour content that is immanent with the commodity and within production seemingly apropos of nothing. Rather, for Bellofiore the golden thread which links the idealized mental abstraction of abstract labour into its objectification in the commodity is *money*, present from the very beginning of the production process. It functions first as 'ideal money', the optimistic mental abstraction from different labours expressed in an idealized monetary form, and finally as 'real money', whereby the labour expended is abstracted from objectively. This transition can only be completed in the act of exchange, and not within the labour itself. In this way, through the conduit of money, abstract labour is both 'precondition' of final exchange and its 'result' (2009, p.185).

For Bellofiore this is the real meaning of Marx's presentation of value as a 'ghost' that 'must *take possession* of a body to exist.' This host body is that of the universal equivalent, gold money, the concrete labour directly or indirectly expended in which functioning as the expression of the abstract labour that initially exists only as idealized potential- 'ideal money'- and then finds objectified form as 'real money'. This highlights capital's status as 'money begetting money' (2009, p.185). It is this latter 'monetary' theory of value that the New Reading of Marx encourages us to adopt. In the case studies in the second part of this thesis, this theoretical orientation can be seen to shed light on the ways in which monetary flows to which agencies are party in rendering services to capitalist firms in other sectors imply certain forms of measurement to be imposed in line with the value they posit.

1.4. The social validation of abstract labour-time

What this monetary theory of value shows us is that the value of a commodity is its 'social value', and as such does not consist in the amount of labour-time expended in its production by any one labouring individual, but rather its socially necessary labour time, the amount of time 'socially required for its production' (Marx, 1976, p.301).⁶ In this way, the circuitist account resonates with what we here call a 'temporal' account. Socially necessary labour time is an ex-post validation, identical in nature to the social validation posited in circuitist accounts of value theory. Concrete labour can achieve use-value, but the dual character of labour entails that only abstract labour can provide the exchange-directed content of the commodity's value, in the shape of a certain mass of congealed, undifferentiated labour-time. The status of 'abstract labour time' is a validation made after the concrete expenditure of labour, and it is only through this validation that labour can be said to produce any value at all. As Bonefeld posits, concrete labour has a 'concrete temporality', which in order to stand as a portion of social labour productive of value must be rendered a component of the abstract, homogenous time of labour in general, the measure of which is socially necessary labour-time. In this way, '[c]oncrete labour time is compelled to occur within the time of its abstract measure. If it does not, it is nothing, valueless'. It is thus labour-time that constitutes the medium through which abstract labour sustains the equivalence of commodity exchange. In making possible undifferentiated generalized labour in the abstract whilst also measuring that very same abstract labour, time 'appears as the substance of the very same activity that it measures' (Bonefeld, 2010,

⁶ Some elements of this section have appeared, in earlier form, in Pitts 2015a and an unpublished MRes dissertation (Pitts 2012).

pp.266-7). It is expressed as both substance and measure through the form of *money*. dependent on the forms of measurement surveyed in the case study in Chapters 9 and 10.

Thus, the NRM rests upon the key role of the exchange abstraction in effecting the social relation of value. But time is also crucial- insofar as it is socially validated as part of the SNLT of society as a whole. This concerns the movement between concrete and abstract labour. Heinrich suggests that abstract labour cannot be counted on the clock, like the hours expended in acts of concrete labour. Rather, abstract labour is not expended at all. Instead, as Heinrich asserts, abstract labour is a 'relation of social validation [...] that is constituted in exchange.' Exchange validates 'privately expended concrete labor' as 'value-constituting abstract labor'. According to Heinrich, this involves three 'acts of reduction' by which diverse concrete labours reduce to abstract labour (2012, pp.50-51). In this reduction, they are socially validated as value-producing.

The first is that the labour-time expended on an individual basis must reduce to SNLT. Only that labour-time resulting in value under average conditions of production is socially necessary. This average only becomes clear in exchange. Successful exchange validates individual labour and the time in which it has taken place as socially necessary. They are thus conferred as part of the abstract social labour, which is the substance and measure of value (2012, p.51).

The second way in which labour is validated as abstract and social is by meeting 'monetary social demand'. It is the combination of these two factors that determines the abstraction of labour in exchange. For instance, say production of a given commodity exceeds monetary social demand. The labour-time has been devoted to the production of one unwanted commodity at the expense of others. The monetary social demand cannot accommodate it (2012, p.51).

Thirdly, the relative worth of individual concrete labour is only established through validation in exchange. Here, it becomes apparent whether different degrees of skill can be said to be productive of different amounts of value. The three movements identified by Heinrich establish the 'extent to which privately expended individual labor *counts* or is *effectively valid* as value-constituting abstract labor'. The three reductions, Heinrich contends, 'take place *simultaneously* in exchange.' (2012, p.52).

Value is thus not a property inserted into the commodity by labour. It is not a property possessed by the commodity at all. Value is instead something 'bestowed *mutually* in the act of exchange.' Marx himself points towards this mutual constitution of value. He suggests that outside their exchange with one another, the coat and linen have no 'value-objectivity'. It is only the relation between the two, in which the labours that produced them equalize and are abstracted from, that can endow them with any such objective value. A product of labour on its own, then, is neither value-bearing nor a commodity. The product of labour is only such when it enters into exchange. But whilst value is not determined prior to exchange, it does not originate 'coincidentally' solely through the exchange act itself. Rather, the '*individual* labor of the producer and the product' meet in a relationship of validation. Here, individually expended labours enter into relation with the '*total labor of society*'. Neither exchange nor labour is therefore seen as 'producing' value. Rather exchange is seen as mediating the relationship between individual and social labour (2012, pp.53-55). But this is the crucial moment. In bestowing value upon abstract social labour through a process of social validation, it brings value into existence.

1.5. Socially Necessary Labour Time

But if socially necessary labour-time is subject to an ex-post validation, then why does concrete labour-time matter at all? Why conduct a study of the case presented in chapters 8, 9 and 10, where the experience of concrete labour time is the central topic of participant testimony, short of any direct reference to the 'non-empirical' reality of value? I explore this question further in Chapters 2 and 3, but for now the understanding of SNLT as a practical abstraction lays down an important foundation for a fuller answer to this question.

In his study of time in the Taylorist factory, Alfred Sohn-Rethel shows how concrete labour-time need not relate to the abstract time of measurement at all. Sohn-Rethel draws upon examples from Frederick Taylor's early experiments in 'scientific management', centring on the reconfiguration of work time in search of greater productivity and efficiency. Sohn-Rethel, grasping that there is no 'inherent' (1978, p.49) relationship between expended labour and its appearance in the value-form, analyses how the Taylorist restructuring of work-time and its measurement make this disconnect clear. The measure of time, Sohn-Rethel suggests, bears no reference to the actual duration it purports to represent. This, as I shall show, resonates with the accounts given in the case study later in the thesis.

Sohn-Rethel quotes Taylor as emphasising that the timing of work relates less to how long something *does* take as to how long it *should* take. Sohn-Rethel notes how, rather than anything objective, these standards are set largely as the result of a 'pretence' which then comes to structure things anyhow- 'the whole intention of Taylorism' and 'scientific job analysis'. That the breaking down and measuring of work in units of time relates not to the reality of duration but to conformity with an ideal standard. It therefore disciplines the worker's use of time, rather than measuring it, and in turn abstracts from the worker's experience of their work and the time in which it passes.

Sohn-Rethel writes that 'the essence of Taylorism' is that 'the standards of labour timing are not to be mistaken for the empiricism of the work as the workers themselves do it'. Rather than corresponding to the experiences of workers themselves, and the time that they take to perform tasks, 'Taylor does not learn his time measure from the workers', but 'imparts the knowledge of it as the laws for their work' (1978, p.154). Thus, the measure does not measure a pre-existing concrete reality, but rather brings into existence an abstract reality- or better, a real abstraction- that rules over and structures concrete practice and lived experience. This as we shall see, captures what the postoperaist foretelling of the crisis of measurability and the law of value do not: namely, that whether concrete expenditure of labour exceeds the quantifiable confines of the working day does not impact upon the ability to capture and measure value- because time measurement, and the arbitration of value that culminates in exchange, refer not to something outside themselves, but rather bring into existence that which they measure through the conferral of monetary worth or the standard of social necessity.

In describing how the empirical passing of work-time is translated into the ideal standard of SNLT, Sohn-Rethel distinguishes between three types of timing: empirical, coercive and synthetic.

Empirical timing measures, or purports to measure, the 'time of the act' itself (1978, p.155). But this time is resistant to direct measurement. Concrete labour, 'as it occurs in society', Sohn-Rethel writes, 'is not of itself quantifiable [...] in terms of labour time unless the labour were identical in kind of the actual differences, material or personal, were disregarded' (1978, p.168). This latter must be achieved so as to ensure the

commensuration of diverse labours in a way that pre-empts their final commensuration in commodity exchange.

The achievement of this owes to a second kind of timing Sohn-Rethel labels *coercive timing*. This takes the empirical 'time of the act' and 'separates [it] from all its contents' (1978, p.155). This is a practical step, which is what gives it its coercive character. As Sohn-Rethel suggests, any system of commensurating labour 'must have a character of causal reality in practice' and cannot be 'merely a calculation existing somewhere on paper'. In the labour process, this causal reality rests on 'an actual process of flow production'. Sohn-Rethel puts this in blunt terms, more readily associated with the cold, hard framework of the factory than with the more ephemeral modes of production found in the creative industries surveyed here: 'Only by a conveyor belt in motion does the calculated proportion of labour which it enforces on the workers assume the functional reality of social labour commensuration' (1978, pp.170-172). But the factory form survives in the new technologies of workplace control which, as I shall show in the case studies that support the largely theoretical speculations offered in these early parts of the thesis, serve the same role as the conveyor belt in structuring creative labour within commensurable limits: computer programs for monitoring progress and recording hours, that translate the chaos of creativity into systematised techniques for the organisation and streamlining of creative tasks. The context of abstract labour and the practical abstractions necessary to its coherence impact upon the way concrete work itself is organised. As the case study shows later in the thesis, the measure helps construct the measured.

The effect of this coercive timing is to open the way for a third kind of timing- one relating less to practice than to the conceptual abstraction the coercive instruments of the factory eventually make possible. This is *synthetic timing*. This, Sohn-Rethel points out (1978, p.155), marks not only a logical extrapolation from the commensurating effects of coercive timing, but a chronological development in the tradition of scientific management, evolving in the work on bricklaying of Taylor's pupil, Frank Gilbreth. What the instruments of coercive timing produce is a quantifiable, abstract time emptied of specificity that can be grasped, manipulated and reconfigured by the 'scientific intellect' according to 'laws' immanent not within the activities 'measured' but stemming from that intellect itself. The intellect breaks the work down into units of a 'fictitious norm of labour timing', 'construed without consulting or watching the worker, even for new jobs which have never yet been practised' In this way, as we shall see, a new-economy creative agency is no different than an old-economy factory. The factory form persists, over and above any change contended in its content. It implies certain methods of abstraction that, as we see in the empirical evidence given in the second part of the thesis, structure work in turn.

Exemplified in what Gilbreth named the 'measured day-rate', this synthetic timing, facilitated by the coercive timing of factory discipline, translates human labour into a purely 'technological category' with no basis in the actual time and practice of human labour at all. It approximates, rather, machinery, and becomes comparable, insertable and adaptable in direct relation with that conceptual and, ultimately, practical proximity with the machine (1978, p.155).

Sohn-Rethel's treatment raises a number of interesting issues. If the abstract labour-time validated ex-post as socially valid bears no relation to concrete labour-time, then why is it a continuing fact that workers must spend their days under the temporal jurisdiction of managers? And on what basis can I propose to study labour-time in this piece of research?

If emphasis falls on the process of social validation of *abstract* labour time, then what is our justification for studying this process through an investigation into the

measurement of labour-time? We can seek some answers first through reference to the work of Chris Arthur. Arthur (2013) suggests that time is central to capitalist enterprise, but only in an 'emptied out' form achieved through practical abstraction, a concept we will cover in more detail in Chapter 2, by which time becomes the measure first of concrete labour and then of abstract, via the implementation of organisational routines and measures.

Arthur begins from a statement of the obvious: 'In commensurating labour, time is what capital selects as its relevant parameter' (Arthur 2013, p.120). But, the question is: why? As Arthur writes, despite the fact that 'concrete labours cannot be aggregated in any meaningful way', due to their qualitative heterogeneity, we are still confronted with the situation whereby capital makes precisely such a 'senseless aggregation ideally'. It does so only 'under the aspect of time.' We ask, therefore, with Arthur: 'How and why is it relevant to abstract from all the features of this collective worker the one dimension of time?' (2013, p.112). If money is the measure of value, then how do we think about labour-time in both its concrete, lived experience and its abstract, quantitative guise? If abstract labour has no concrete existence or duration, why measure it in terms of time? In answering these questions, I will first set out some foundations.

1. The wage is not paid for concrete labour time, but for the reproduction of labour power. It is not tied to any actual amount of time. Rather, it pays for the worker to live. Indeed, the very status of the wage in capitalist society is to allow the capitalist to gain a value greater than the value of the labour-power for which he or she has paid. This is not robbery, but a situation implied within the formal legal relationship of equality between buyer and seller established in the contract of employment. As such, the wage is not presupposed on a certain number of hours, even though the imposition of National Minimum Wages and so on may suggest as much. The wage also, as discussed previously, already abstracts from concrete labour. Through its price- the wage- the expenditure of labour power as concrete labour enters into a monetary framework of abstraction that measures and structures its practical existence. This measure need not capture the experienced concrete reality of the expended labour. It establishes its own reality, subservient to monetary quantification. This abstraction follows from the status of the wage itself, as a payment to live- i.e., to reproduce one's labour power- rather than a recompense for labour itself.

2. 'Essence must appear' (Adorno, 1974), and value contains within itself and implies the categories of profit, surplus value etc.- because at its foundation is the capitalist's desire to turn a buck, which in turn incorporates the popular dispossession from the means of living and the compulsion to sell one's labour power to survive, and the presence of a buyer for that labour-power later put to productive ends. The capitalist pursuit of surplus-value- as the social reproduction of the system itself- cannot be divorced from the realisation of value in commodity exchange. This completes the abstraction of labour which proceeds initially through its positing as value-producing, intermediately through the practical abstractions that take place in production (comparison, measurement, rationalisation) and, finally, through the commensuration of commodities, which brings isolated private labours into a relation of full equivalence with one another.

3. Labour time is posited as value-bearing and value-producing by being abstracted from as pure time carrying a monetary value. The wage helps achieve this, but the time it tallies with is an internal accounting mechanism rather than the thing for which the wage is paid. This accounting mechanism enables the practical abstraction of labour by means of its measurement- the measure positing its own reality, bringing the measured- value- into being in a preliminary, potential form from its latent origins in the buying and selling of labour-power. Why time? Time becomes the means by

which this is effected by virtue of the imperatives of competition and turnover, of getting (more) goods to market as quickly and efficiently as possible, and also of commensurating labour processes in such a way that their procedures and outcomes are comparable with other such processes (see Arthur, 2013).

As we shall see, in Chapters 8, 9 and 10, the case study reveals billable hours to be precisely such a form of time, abstracting from and positing as value-bearing and value-producing the labour they measure and discipline. They function like the Taylorised time Sohn-Rethel identifies: fictional, with little or no reference to the reality they describe, only to the reality they create. In this way, we come back to where we began: to the wage, which although auspiciously tied to an amount of hours, in fact pays for no hours at all, and guarantees subservience and social reproduction at a different level. Time- monetised, abstract time rather than time as lived and experienced duration- is a convenient fiction at every step of the way.

1.6. Time in the circuit of capital

If we look outward from the workplace to labour's imbrication in the circuit of capital, we can suggest some reasons why time reigns supreme in the workplace despite its significance, according to the letter of the law of value, pertaining less to concrete expenditure than its abstract social form.

This can be understood with reference to the theories of value discussed above. What the monetary theory of value shows is that value is monetary from the start, with the finance that commences all rounds of production an advance on what does not yet exist. This induces pressure on capitalists to conform to certain abstract economic compulsions from the off, and puts all that follows under the sign of monetary value, and, thus, its appearance in the abstract time of pure measure that Sohn-Rethel identifies. As we see, for Arthur, the competitive and compulsive incitements placed upon capitalists to measure labour circulate around a time emptied of all content, the pure time taken by a given round of production. As socially necessary labour time, this takes on not only an ex-post existence but comes to structure the practice and experience of work itself. The empirical case study explains this dynamic in more detail.

In response to Arthur's posing of the question 'why time?', we can define eight 'C's, each representing a different aspect of why time offers itself as the measure *par excellence* of abstract labour: creation, competition, comparison, commensuration, circulation, counting, control and compulsion. They provide an implicit backdrop for the tendencies covered later in Chapters 8,9 and 10.

Creation: This relates to the basic condition whereby the creation of a given thing- a good or a service- capable of bearing value takes up time, and uses labour. Note that this is different to saying that the creation of *value* takes time and labour. This is a question of the material process of producing a good or service that *has* value, potentially or actually. Arthur writes: 'Since labour is necessary to produce what has value, capital must time it [...]. New value cannot be generated all at once, but takes time, because living labour takes time to produce what has value' (Arthur, 2013, p.113). That this is so introduces a practical necessity to time whatever takes place in the workplace, for other reasons that we shall discuss shortly. What is important to remember, however, is that the concrete activity that creates the thing which *has* value is sublated and forgotten in the value form. The measurement of 'time taken' here need not refer to a concrete expenditure of labour, but is rather the outgrowth of things taking place in time in the first place, applied to ideal measurements of abstract labour's 'senseless aggregation' (2013, p.112).

Competition: The imperative to time labour relates also to the competition between capitals. Labour must be timed because time is crucial in a given capital's competition with other capitals. The timing of labour allows comparison against other capitals and the rationalisation and speeding-up of processes to get goods to market before competitors (these points follow in further detail). As we will see, the agencies featured in the case study act both out of competition with one another for successes in meeting briefs, gaining further work from clients, and developing a strong portfolio, but, perhaps as importantly, act in service of the competition between capitalists elsewhere in the economy as actors who intervene in the buying and selling of the commodities they produce. The case study finds that this implication in the world market affects the way in which agency employees work.

Comparison: Arthur suggests that '[t]he adding of concrete labours by time is required because this is the dimension in which the comparison of one process to another is undertaken by capital' (2013, p.113). This takes two forms: internal and external. Internally, capitals can compare one labour process with another across time and space- departments, locations, years, quarters, shifts, days etc. Externally, capitals can compare themselves against one another in the competitive struggle to get goods to market and use labour and resources efficiently. The power of comparison afforded by time measurement is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The time something takes becomes the time taken (Arthur 2013, p.113). Thus, the labour process itself- its structure, its pace, the everyday lived experience of it- becomes the residue of standards of comparison established in the past and henceforth updated. This generates the 'empty time' of socially necessary labour time, of which more later.

Commensuration: Arthur writes 'there is no process through which the individual labourers commensurate their toil and trouble with that of others. The products have a unitary form as products of capital. Thus capitals commensurate *their* toil and trouble, namely the time they are tied up in the production process, the time taken to pump out labour from recalcitrant workers' (Arthur 2013, p.106). Practically, then, measurement on the basis of time creates the conditions whereby labour can be abstracted from in the exchange of its product as a commodity along with all the other commodities and their labours by means of money as the universal equivalent.

Circulation: Capital abstracts 'under the aspect of time', Arthur contends, 'because it needs to get the commodities out as quickly as possible' (2013, p.112), and this is a question of time. Time is here a measure of success but also a disciplining tool to increase the speed and intensity of the labour process. In the case study in the second part of the thesis, this imperative brings agencies into its orbit, in spite of the incipiently relaxed outlooks of the creatives engaged in making swift progress on the projects at hand.

Counting: As well as using time to compare and commensurate labour processes, capital uses concrete labour time more basically as a means of counting labour in terms of its duration. As Arthur writes, '[m]aterial labour [...] is *counted* as simple duration because that is what *capital* counts as effective in generating value' (2013, p.114). The more time that is spent on something, or the closer the time spent on something to the going average, the better or more successful a given labour process is said to be. Time offers itself here as the go-to measure of this, associated as it is with the duration of activities and of bodies through space.

Control: Measuring concrete labour through time allows the manipulation and disciplining of work and workers. Materially, as Arthur notes, 'only *concrete* labour is subject to reshaping' (2013, p.114). It is not possible for capital to 'economise' on abstract labour. This is because the latter cannot be 'measured and minimised' in its practical occurrence, for it has no such concrete existence. Only concrete labour can

be quantified and adapted in this way. Nonetheless, the measurement of concrete labour time does posit and refer to an abstract measure- the 'empty' pure motion through time of social necessary labour.

Compulsion: Only concrete labour can be practically manipulated and reshaped. But the demands, expectations, means and frameworks through which this takes place are abstract. Perhaps, therefore, the central of our eight 'c's, and the one which constitutes a golden thread uniting the other seven, is *compulsion*. The choice of concrete labour time as the purported measure of labour- and the construction from this of an abstract, empty time of SNLT- is subject to abstract economic compulsions (see Bonefeld 2014) and social domination that exists both beyond and through the individual volitions of those involved, whether capitalist or worker. As Arthur contends, 'each industry has its specific way of pumping out [concrete] labour, even if ideal demands are presented to it abstractly and require concrete interpretation by managers' (2013, p.114). The 'ideal' and 'abstract' character of these demands relate to the monetary imperatives they imply, and the pressures that the monetary status of these imperatives place upon capitalist functionaries to enact all of what we have covered above: commensurate, compare, control etc. It coerces actors to bring their actions and measurements in line with the prevailing standard of socially necessary labour time- as we shall see, the standard of the 'time taken' for labour processes both in particular and in general.

In this way- and on this Arthur's analysis does not go far enough- concrete labour is not only measured, but distorted in practice and experience by an abstract framework of ideal demands and measures. This comes through in the case study analysis given later, where the timesheet measures not the time something takes but what Arthur calls the 'time taken'. Reading Sohn-Rethel alongside Arthur's conceptualisation of SNLT, this shows that the measures of time used in the workplace construct a new reality rather than represent an existing one. The market-mediated forms of measure bring about the measured by restructuring the practices and experience of the raw material with which they work, the evidence given in Chapters 8, 9 and 10 suggests.

SNLT is the theoretical key to the 8 Cs delineated above. It is the link between the measurement of concrete labour time as it happens and the abstract labour it is hypostatized into as part of the totality of private activities commensurated in the value-form. This link between external and internal relations of exchange is detailed further in the empirical chapters in the second part of the thesis.

Arthur suggests that, rather than themselves moving through a preordained objective time, the time itself- established by the abstract economic compulsion placed upon capital- moves through the worker, and 'takes the worker as its carrier'. This time is an empty time, elapsed time commensurable with other empty, elapsed time. The time something takes becomes, henceforth, 'the time taken', and thereafter the time that moves through the worker as its carrier. The labour process, therefore, represents nothing other than the 'trace' of this 'time taken' (2013, p.113).

What makes this 'empty' abstract time researchable, as explored further in the next two chapters, is the practical and material effects it assumes both through its constitution in a set of decisions taken by human actors under the spell of real economic compulsion associated with the social reproduction of their 'actual conditions of life' (Bonefeld 2014) and the impact of the experiential and affective movement through this time in practice. Participants in my study, via the forms of real appearance through which they encounter these processes, are thus able to testify to their efficacy. As Arthur writes, in its materiality, and the concrete conditions of antagonism, exhaustion and domination it implies, both psychologically and bodily, this abstraction is a 'practical reality' rooted in real actions. But through these

practices proceeds an empty time, 'unqualified by any natural rhythms' (Arthur 2013). The exploration of how these rhythms jar is central to the method implemented in the case study.

1.7. Conclusion

This tells us that the value-form is not something that owes its existence solely to the moment of exchange, but has a practical, and also tentative, existence in the sphere of production itself, that hinges on ultimate arbitration through social validation in and by the market. The account given at the beginning of this chapter of the differing viewpoints on the labour theory of value courtesy of traditional Marxism and value-form analysis portrays an intellectual field divided over one central issue: the relative determination of value in either the sphere of production or that of circulation.⁷ However, as the criticisms raised demonstrate, neither seems to provide a sufficient and convincing case in support of one or the other. Within value-form analysis, which has been displayed to possess a significant theoretical edge over its more traditional counterpart, there has arisen a willingness to engage with value theory in a manner which acknowledges the merits, correctives and essential revisions offered by circulationism whilst seeking to locate matters more proportionally in the field of production.

The combination of circuitist and temporal interpretations of the theory of value allow us to articulate a distinct position which orients itself towards an explanation situated in both production *and* circulation as opposed to one or the other. As regards the different conceptualisations of Marx's theory of value, we have sought to plot the different positions on a spectrum delineated by whether or not the given approach emphasises *production* or *circulation* as the sphere in which value is determined. In the wake of selected value-form critiques of traditional Marxism, we have set out an alternative position that emphasises both production *and* circulation as parts of a totalising process of value determination. This theorisation of value, by making clear that value concerns not the quantification of immediate labour and its concrete expenditure but rather its abstraction through socially mediated forms of appearance, becomes a platform, in the middle section of the thesis (Chapters 4-6), to conduct a thoroughgoing critique of the postoperaist understanding of labour and value in contemporary capitalism.

⁷ This conclusion draws on elements of an unpublished MRes dissertation (Pitts 2012)

2. RESEARCHING VALUE, LABOUR AND TIME

2.1. Introduction

Marx writes in *Capital* that the 'production process' is composed of 'two aspects', the 'labour process' and the 'valorisation process' (1976, p.304). The former is the carrier of the latter. This has implications for how we approach the workplace, epistemologically and ontologically, and how value is 'posited' (Arthur 2013) in the relation between it and its outside. In a 1981 paper on value theory and social research, Erik Olin Wright identifies the relative isolation of Marxian value theory from the 'concrete investigation [...] of social life'.⁸ The two meet only implicitly in the wide body of Marxist-influenced workplace studies. The issue of how the two might be reconciled is the central problematic of this chapter. Wright contends that

Debates on the labour theory of value are usually waged at the most abstract levels of theoretical discourse. Frequently these debates are preoccupied with questions of the appropriate methodological stance toward social analysis, epistemological disputes about what it means to 'explain' a social process, and mathematical arguments about the merits of competing ways of formally deriving certain categories from others. Rarely are the issues posed in terms of their implications for the concrete investigations of social life in which social scientists would engage. (1981a, p.36)

According to Wright, the Marxist analysis of labour and value provokes researchers to look closely at the labour process, due to the central role played by the 'socio-technical conditions of production' in determining the value conferred upon the commodity. In this way, a simple picture of the inputs and outputs of production is inadequate; rather, what happens in between becomes central (Wright, 1981a, p.63). The labour theory of value 'systematically direct[s] research towards questions of the labour process and its relationship to classes' by situating the 'conceptualisation of classes in terms of exploitation based in the relations of production' (Wright, 1981b, pp.130-1). This could be used as an explanatory factor for both class-struggle and labour-process streams of empirical research. In the seminal workplace ethnographies published in the UK over the 1970s and 1980s, examples such as Ruth Cavendish's *Women on the line* (1982) and Huw Benyon's *Working for Ford* (1984) focused on the everyday conditions of work and the struggles between workers and management. The former possessed the virtue of linking what happens in the workplace to wider set of social positions and practices constituted on the basis of gender. In the USA, labour process researchers, such as Michael Burawoy in his study *Manufacturing consent* (1982), assessed the particular practices of control, discipline and domination exerted by management upon their workers.

The most notable among attempts at fully-fledged social research within the Marxist tradition are those carried out in Italy over the course of the sixties and seventies under the banner of the 'inquiry', of which some of the theorists critiqued in Chapters 4-7 were practitioners (see Pitts, 2014). But such approaches are deficient where the study of the theory of value is concerned. Whilst providing valuable insights into the quotidian conditions of work in contemporary capitalism, and compelling evidence as to the veracity of the Marxist concept of exploitation, such examples bear only the slightest proximity to the conceptual framework of the theory of value, with its explanation of how individual labours are rendered social by the system of commodity exchange, a mistake, incidentally, that largely owes to the specific theoretical assumptions of those involved with the development of the inquiry method. I will critique these assumptions in later chapters.

⁸ Earlier versions of some elements of this introduction appeared in Pitts 2014 and, before that, in an even earlier form in the aforementioned MRes dissertation (Pitts, 2012).

These examples suggest that instances of class conflict and domination provide a far more observable set of phenomena for research than do the categories of Marx's theory of value. The theory of value and its attendant categories (such as abstract labour) are only ever at best *implicit* in such research, but 'rarely is it explicitly incorporated into the *conceptualisation of the problem*' (Wright, 1981a, p.65, emphasis added). In light of this, this chapter is an attempt to explore how the theory of value can be *conceptualised as a problem* for social research to investigate. We will first outline in brief the conception of value theory henceforth utilised, with an emphasis on the latency and process of becoming behind the non-empirical ephemerality that makes value such a difficult topic to research with an empirical study.

As we have seen, the only labour that takes place is concrete, and, by extension, the study of concrete labour in and of itself offers little in the way of understanding of the true function of labour in the production of value, which relates to abstract labour. This inhibits the ability to interpret what is specific and notable about the existence of capitalist labour itself. Rather than constituting a set of observable and researchable practices that allow us to get to the bottom of value-producing labour, concrete labour comes to take a role in the production of value only by means of its mediation through the immaterial process whereby value is assigned to a quantity of abstract labour.

Thus, research geared solely towards concrete labour, its conditions and the experience of it can touch upon only part of the reality of labour under capital. Research must instead be geared towards the social totality in which abstract labour is brought into existence. The 'commodity moment' marks only the resolution of a process of abstraction that begins with the inception of the production process. The expectation of monetary return which guides business activity already gives a tentative, latent form to abstract labour, and lays the foundation for its social validation over the whole course of the circuit of value creation. It is the crystallisation of abstract social labour-time in the form of money that marks the endpoint in what is in effect a *process* of social validation that begins in an ideal form as soon as bank finance sets the ball rolling. Whilst one can accept that the material paraphernalia of working life – wages, timesheets, performance indicators, targets, commission and, perhaps most of all, the clock – can all be seen as agents of this process of abstraction that are actively lived and experienced by workers (and it is towards these dimensions that my own research is directed), there remains a sphere of determination which exceeds these easily experienced and observed manifestations of social validation, taking on both empirical and non-empirical reality in the social totality at large, in money, commodities, circulation and consumption- namely, in the circuit of capital as a whole. In the case study, specifically in Chapter 8 but also in the two that follow it, I try to capture this wider social setting in its relation with the sphere of concrete labour.

Beginning from the basis that the exchange abstraction that synthesises capitalist society is a real abstraction (Sohn-Rethel, 1978), here I set out some foundations for a way forward in a research agenda around the value-form. The latter is a conceptuality with a material, practical existence in antagonistic social relations. This is sublated (Arthur, 2013) in the value form. But as Bonefeld writes, 'reality contains within itself what it denies' (2014, p.64). Critiquing economic categories reveals the materiality of concepts and the conceptuality of the material world. Thus, the coin in one's pocket 'carries the bond with society', a bond that concerns 'the struggle for access to the means of subsistence' (Bonefeld, 2016b, p.240, see also Marx, 1993, pp.156-7). The coin expresses and is concerned with this bond. But it also expresses a concept- value- inseparable from its constitution in the actual relations of life. The struggle for subsistence is as conceptual as it is material. But through its rootedness in subsistence the concept attains a real materiality. Reality, in this way, is socially

constituted through human practice. As Horkheimer (quoted in Bonefeld, 2016a, p.60) writes, '[h]uman beings produce, through their own labour, a reality that increasingly enslaves them'. This link with practice defines value as a possible object of research.

2.2. Abstraction and latency

The idea of value as being the product of a social validation of labour enacted through exchange but present in a pre-emptory way in production brings an unusual focus to a programme of social research.⁹ Value here is an abstraction which is essentially *emergent*, reliant upon a dialectic of potentiality and actuality, and is hard to grasp.

Bellofiore follows Lucio Colletti (1973, 1989) and Claudio Napoleoni (1975) in suggesting that the abstraction of labour is a mystical, metaphysical, mental abstraction that takes the form of a *real hypostatization* taking place *in reality*. The abstraction that takes place in exchange is merely 'the end-point of a *process* of real hypostatization' that involves the whole capitalist cycle, including production (Bellofiore, 2009, p.180 [emphasis added]). At its most basic and earliest level, this can be exhibited in the fact that '*on the labour market, the worker has to be seen as an appendix of the commodity he/[she] sells, labour power*'. This leads Bellofiore to posit that 'abstract labour is not a mental generalization but a *real abstraction*. It goes on daily in the 'final' *commodity market*, but also in the *labour market* and *immediate production*' (2009, p.183).

Such a perspective holds abstraction to be a process rather than an instance. As the *Endnotes* collective suggests (2010), value is a process which takes different forms at different times- money, labour-power, commodities, and then money again. This process-oriented conception of value is a central element of circuitist positions on value, and provides a useful counterweight against theorisations which present the production of value in a static, reductive way. Bellofiore and Finelli (1998) associate the theoretical foundations of Marx's conceptualisation of value in the nexus of possibility, potentiality and actuality presented in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1998, Book *Theta*, pp.251-283). In Aristotle's schema, *possibility* is only the conceivable 'capacity to be', *potentiality* achieves 'being' in the sense that it is 'the unfolding of a form already implicit', and *actuality* is the result of potentiality's full unfolding. According to Bellofiore and Finelli, labour and value can be read along these lines, with labour power as 'the potentiality for labour', of which living labour is the actuality. At the same time, this actuality of labour is *potential* value, of which money is the actuality. Money then stands as 'potential capital', which can attain actuality through the valorisation of the labour process by means of exchange (Bellofiore and Finelli, 1998 pp.55-56).

As we saw towards the end of the last chapter, rather than the simultaneous 'performance' of concrete and abstract labour, it is perhaps better to see the latter as merely *latent* in the former, a mere possibility or potentiality awaiting actualization. As Marx writes, '[s]ocial labour-time exists in [...] commodities in a latent state, [...] and becomes evident only in the course of their exchange.' Therefore, writes Marx, '[u]niversal social labour is consequently not a ready-made prerequisite but an emerging result' (1859). It is this latency that constitutes the conceptual thread which situates value at a point of articulation *between* both production and circulation. Rubin saw Marx as situating the exchange abstraction not merely post-production, but as a process which has its traces at every stage of the capitalist circuit (Bellofiore, 2009, pp.183-4). Following Rubin, Bellofiore discusses money and abstract labour as '*diachronic* concepts 'in motion', perpetually *in becoming*' (2009, p.188). Rubin's belief

⁹ Elements of this section appeared in earlier form in the previously discussed MRes dissertation (Pitts, 2012) and journal article (Pitts, 2014).

in the latency of abstract labour is best summed up where he writes that abstract labour is 'not something to which form adheres from the outside. Rather, through its development, the content itself gives birth to the form which was already latent in the content.' (Rubin, 1972, p.117). Bellofiore sees labour as inhabiting two characteristics in the very same activity. It is both concrete in that it possesses specific properties and '*latently abstract*' in that it possesses the 'tentative' promise of producing money (Bellofiore, 2009, p.189).

In contrast to productionist and circulationist variants of value theory, this perhaps is a more moderate way of placing abstract labour at the point of exchange- to say that it is only *latent* in production, a dual character of labour that is only half 'there' at any one time. In the same way that labour-power is not labour but the potential to be so, so too is abstract labour *not* labour but its residual aggregation. The first 'non-labour' is introduced before the labour process, the second arises afterwards. The belief in abstract labour as a 'type' of labour incites the expectation that this labour should be responsible for producing something, a misguided expectation that Marx does nothing to discourage with his representation of abstract labour as that element which gives rise to value and acts as its 'substance' (Elson, 1979, p.148) Marx himself does confuse matters somewhat when he writes of abstract labour that it is at once 'quantities of homogeneous human labour' (1976, p.128) and 'human labour pure and simple, the expenditure of human labour in general' (1976, p.135). The two accounts are marked by differing temporal perspectives, the first conveying abstraction as a retrospective summation of the labour that has taken place, the second suggesting that this abstraction functions through the expenditure of general human labour on the job. The first places an emphasis upon abstract labour as the aggregation of abstract labour-time *ex post*, whereas the second places an emphasis upon abstract labour as something with a concrete, active existence. It is the former, *ex post* appreciation- henceforth referred to as one of 'social validation'- which proves adequate to a conception of abstract labour as latent.

This latency is evinced in the means by which abstract labour is measured, as an average established after production has taken place. Abstract labour cannot be counted on the clock, like the hours expended in acts of concrete labour. Rather, abstract labour is not expended at all. Instead, as Heinrich asserts, abstract labour is a '*relation of social validation* that is constituted in exchange.' In this process, 'privately expended concrete labor' is validated as 'a particular quantum of value-constituting abstract labor' (Heinrich, 2012, pp.50-51). Therefore, the determination of value is considered to be subject to a process located within the entire circuit of production and circulation.

In foregrounding the process of social validation by which labour is rendered productive of value, the theory of value given here has placed an emphasis upon abstract labour rather than concrete as the key guise in which labour assumes importance in the capitalist mode of production. In this conceptualisation, once a product of labour is confirmed as a commodity possessed of value and exchangeability, the *concrete* specificity of individual labours is *abstracted from* in order to smooth out the former's differences and constitute pure, undifferentiated homogeneous labour expressed in exchangeable commodities. By means of this process, the labour which went into a commodity's production is *validated* as a portion of the total abstract labour of society, as *productive* labour which has helped bestow value upon a good or service so that it can stand as a commodity in a relationship of equivalence and commensurability with the other commodities of the market by means of money.

Hence, abstract labour does not take place at all, but is an invention of the process of abstraction that stems from the concrete, private nature of the labour that takes place in capitalist society – it becomes social and abstract only after it has occurred.

2.3. Modes of existence

Part of the problem with extracting from this nexus a suitable object of research is the appearance of value in various modes of existence hard- but, as we shall see, not impossible- to capture with a conventional research approach. We will begin our attempt to sketch a conception of an adequate object of research by establishing some theoretical foundations.¹⁰ Richard Gunn differentiates two modes of theorising, *determinate* and *empiricist* abstraction (1992, p.23). The simplest way to sum up what Gunn means when he poses empiricist abstraction against determinate abstraction is that the former refers to a mental category, such as 'production', which abstracts from and irons out the differences between all the different modes of production to create one which functions as a synonym for all, whereas the latter refers to an abstraction that has a real existence, such as the abstraction 'labour', which may well function as an empiricist abstraction, taking all the different kinds of work and abstracting from them for ease of presentation, but also has a social form that arrives with the development of the exchange relation, in which different and multifarious labours are abstracted from in the shape of value (Gunn, 1989, pp.19-21). Whereas empiricist abstraction relies upon a set of *external* relations, determinate abstraction describes a situation of *internal* relatedness strung together by the totalizing modes of existence of social phenomena. In this internal relatedness, A might be B's mode of existence (or 'form'), with B also as A's mode of existence. Furthermore, C might be B's mode of existence, and D the mode of existence of C whilst also having a separate mode of existence as A. This 'criss-crossing field of mediations' constitutes a totality, no part of which persists on its own (Gunn, 1992, p.24).

The internal relatedness described by Gunn is not defined by mere *relations* between things, nor *equivalences*. Rather, what faces us are actual *samenesses*, complete *identicalities*, in which things stand as modes of existence of one another (1992, p.24), but in which is implied an irreducible non-identity. This has implications for social research. One that may be inferred from this explanation of determinate abstraction is that research objects are essentially *elusive*, present only in the totality of relations, appearances and modes of existence itself. The mode of existence, for Gunn, conforms precisely to that Aristotelian notion of process which we earlier attributed to the production of value. For Gunn, 'actuality and activity are the same thing', and to *be* is to *do* (1992, n.14, p.38). The mode of existence, then, must not be seen as a passive or static 'being', but an active 'doing', in which 'existence' is read as *existence* or *ek-stasis* or *ecstasy*, i.e., in an active way, in which 'nothing static [...] inheres' (1992, p.21).

For Gunn, such 'existence-in-practice' is the hallmark of determinate abstraction, and 'mode of existence' the true object of the study of 'form' (1992, p.23). As such, a clear link can be drawn between the study of value as a social form and the idea of value as a process of possibility, potentiality and actuality- a mode of active *existence*. Furthermore, such a form is not only marked by its active existence as a process, but through its constitution as 'an internally related 'field'', in which 'anything can be the mode of existence of anything else'. In these two aspects – what Gunn calls 'unfixity of form' (1992, p.32) and internal relatedness – is presented the real problem which

¹⁰ Elements of this section appeared in earlier form in an unpublished MRes dissertation (Pitts 2012) and journal article (Pitts 2014).

faces researchers who venture into the study of value theory and its categories: the mode of existence.

Thus, in the course of its becoming, value can be seen as subject to a constant procession of such 'modes of existence', of which internal relatedness and unfixity of form are the chief features. In the first, *internal relatedness*, all things appear as everything else. In the second, *unfixity of form*, each manifestation of form is fleeting, fugitive and elusive. These issues present obvious problems for social research geared to the investigation of the value form. The conceptualisation offered by Gunn would seem to suggest that what is needed is a social research which rather than avoiding or attempting to reduce the internal relatedness and unfixity of the phenomena which it studies, is geared towards the investigation of modes of existence as an object of research.

We might phrase the sequence of these modes of existence in the following way. Labour is significant in capitalism by virtue of its abstraction and validation as value-producing. Hence, to investigate labour under capital, one must look to value. Value and its categories are elusive, and its investigation always points towards another place. For instance, value theory might direct the research towards the other commodity in which the value of a given commodity is represented. Furthermore, the social labour-time necessary for a commodity's reproduction of course pertains to that amount of labour time necessary to expend in order to be able to create the means by which the commodity may be purchased or exchanged for. This implies that in order to judge socially necessary labour time, one must look at another commodity, and for that, another, and so on and on endlessly. The commodity only possesses value insofar as it is drawn into a relation of equivalence with other commodities- or indeed the universal equivalent of money. In order to research labour-time, for instance, we must first look not at the commodity produced in that labour-time, but another commodity, or, indeed, money itself. This demands a holistic approach to research which encapsulates both production and circulation. This means that it cannot follow previous Marxist social research in limiting itself to the workplace, instead situating itself in the whole totality of capitalist social relations. The case study in the latter part of this thesis pushes against the constraints that confront any attempt to capture the totality of social form in an applied research context.

As the description of the different stages that value takes in the process of production and circulation which forms its central movement displays, value is an elusive category to research, constantly withdrawing from quick and easy observation. A social, all-encompassing investigation of the totality of relations is needed in order to capture some impression of the 'modes of existence' that value assumes in society. The law of value cannot be researched without consideration of exchange, abstraction and circulation. What is needed is a research approach which does not limit itself to the labour-process or the realm of production, but can appreciate the capitalist circuit in the round. I do this in the case study by linking as far as possible workplace processes to their imbrication in the social mediations and compulsions of market exchange.

The position of work and workers in capitalist society – and by extension its link with value, that key principal towards which all critique of capitalism must direct itself – cannot be researched solely on the basis of work, workers and workplaces, without consideration of the process of exchange, abstraction and circulation which truly renders work and those who perform it an important and significant phenomenon, by means of the role played in the determination of value and, thus, the forms of appearance value assumes. But equally, this non-empirical reality is rooted in a non-conceptual sphere of material relations that can be accessed more easily at the level of social research. I consider this aspect in the next chapter. To illustrate the

beginnings of this understanding, we turn to the work of Werner Bonefeld, and his Open Marxist critique of the NRM.

2.4. The Open Marxist Critique of the New Reading of Marx

The theorisation of value given up to this point in Chapter 1 may seem, in emphasising the abstract unfolding of the value relation through exchange, somewhat ephemeral and uprooted from concrete circumstance.¹¹ But, as critical complements to the NRM tradition make clear, we cannot forget that what happens in exchange also depends upon the existence of certain social relations of production and 'actual conditions of life' that make abstract labour practically possible. Bonefeld's critique of the NRM is particularly important in this regard.

In line with Bonefeld (2014), my approach to Marx treats his critique of political economy as a critical theory of society rather than as an economic theory. I employ Bonefeld's Open Marxist critique of the NRM to advance an interpretation whereby the abstract unfolding of value theorised by the NRM is rooted in the relations of violence, property, struggle and subsistence.

On surface inspection, Bonefeld is of a piece with NRM theorists. He arrives from a similar Marxian tendency of reinterpretation and revisionism. He has a background of published interaction and collaboration with many of its key names (see contributions to the edited collections Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis, 1992 and Bonefeld and Psychopedis, 2005. See also Heinrich and Bonefeld, 2011). Both Bonefeld and the other thinkers associated with the New Reading take a Frankfurt School-inflected approach to Marx. This recasts the critique of political economy as a social theory (see Bellofiore and Riva, 2015). In his value theory, Bonefeld shares with the NRM an anti-substantialist emphasis on abstraction and social validation. Indeed, Bonefeld acknowledges the important lead made by the NRM. They 'introduced a Marxism stripped of dogmatic certainties and naturalistic conceptions of society' (2014, pp.41-42).

But for Bonefeld the NRM's 'critical focus' is 'blinkered'. The NRM rightly undermines 'the orthodox instrumentalization of the categories of class and labour'. But it goes too far in substituting these categories with the value-form. This leads to a general neglect of labour, class, surplus-value and the separation of the worker from the means of subsistence. Where Bonefeld sees these as integral to the value-form, the NRM has a tendency to underplay or ignore them.

Bonefeld recasts the 'critique of political economy as a critical social theory' (Bonefeld, 2014, p.3). The critique centres upon economic objectivity and the political form of capitalist society. It exposes their imbrication in the relationship of class antagonism upon which capitalism rests. Exploring the social constitution of economic categories in antagonistic social relations that sustain the law of value, Bonefeld highlights their absence in the NRM. He attributes this to the NRM interpretation of the 'logical' rather than historical exposition Marx employs in *Capital* (1976). Bonefeld stresses instead the importance of the real historical separation of workers from their means of subsistence in the development of capitalism. Bonefeld's critique of the NRM rests on this point. Class is therefore a key element of the capitalist form of wealth. There is a relationship between classed labour and its expression as abstract labour in exchange.

For Bonefeld, the study of the value-form does not exclude labour power, class, surplus-value and separation, but presupposes them. Valorisation is predisposed upon the pursuit of profit. Profit cannot occur from the exchange of equivalents.

¹¹ Elements of this section have been published as Pitts 2015b.

Someone must lose out. Thus surplus value cannot be absent from the conceptualisation of the value-form, but immanent within it. The motivation for equivalence and commensuration is the pursuit of profit from the appropriation of surplus labour. This is because it is upon the exchange abstraction that the validation of this appropriated surplus labour depends. Capital seeks to 'validate in exchange in the form of value' the 'appropriation of the surplus labour that capital is able to extract' (2014, p.87). It is only insofar as this happens that one can identify surplus-value. But, equally, '[l]abour has to produce surplus value for money to maintain value validity' (2014, p.66). So the two sides are implicated in each other. The value relation and the exchange abstraction are 'premised' on surplus value (2014, p.43).

Because of the centrality of surplus value to the value form, class is the 'critical category of the entire system of capitalist wealth'. It 'appears in the form of an equivalent exchange [...] between unequal values'. Expressed in this 'real' appearance is the 'surplus value that has been 'pumped out of the workers'', in Marx's words. Thus, Adorno can make his claim that, as Bonefeld puts it, 'the mysterious character of the value form lies 'in the concept of surplus value' (2014, p.102). Class is central to this in that profit 'entails the class relationship between the buyer of labour power and the producer of surplus value as seller of labour power' (2014, p.43). This in turn implies the pre-existence of labour power as a commodity. The condition of this is primitive accumulation, the forceful and continued separation of workers from the means of subsistence. This sets them to market with only their potential to labour to sell.

For Bonefeld, this story is seldom told in the work of the NRM. Bonefeld states that '[t]he conceptuality of the law of value is antagonistic from the outset' (2014, p.82). According to Bonefeld, the NRM's oversight relates to two broader imperatives. The first is the interpretation of Marx's presentational progression in *Capital*. For the NRM, this is a *logical* exposition. For Bonefeld, this reading irons out the specific historical context of the establishment of commodity exchange and the value relation. It elides the centrality of property relations and the commodification of labour power. The value-form cannot be considered in abstraction from the continued unfolding of a historical process. The separation of one class from the means of subsistence, through enclosure, dispossession and coercion. The creation of a class of workers, with another class purchasing their only means of survival, the commodified potential to labour. The continuing contemporary role of state and capital in reproducing and enforcing this separation. From each other, from nature, from property, from independent means, this division proliferates on a daily, national and global basis. For Bonefeld, *Capital's* exposition 'is in reverse order to the actual, historical sequence in which the social relations underlying [its] categories developed' (2014, pp.90-91). One understands the ape from the vantage point of man, rather than man from the vantage point of the ape (Marx, 1993, p.105).

This history is not something of the distant past, but a continuing state of affairs that must be reproduced. A second imperative compounds the NRM's neglect of this antagonistic constancy. According to Bonefeld, the NRM holds the value-form to be an 'abstractly self-moving essence of wealth'. This conceptualisation of the law of value as an abstract compulsion elides its antagonistic undertow. Rather than deriving from this abstract compulsion, the class antagonism is rather its 'constitutive premise' (2014, p.9). The equivalence of exchange that theories of the value-form explore has its basis in the pursuit of profit by way of *unequal* exchange. This unequal exchange is predicated on a classed society. To ignore this is to adopt exactly the 'logical' stance discussed previously. It sees the value form 'as some secularized thing that is valid in-itself, as if value posits more value just like that, without certificate of birth' (2014, p.42).

Thus, Bonefeld has a dual critique of the NRM. It focuses first on the account of Marx's purportedly 'logical' exposition. It then moves to the ascription of a 'dull compulsion of economic need' (2014, p.175). In both respects, the critique of the NRM flows into the thesis's radical political implications. This has two features. First, Bonefeld follows Adorno in understanding society as 'antagonistic from the outset'. This shifts the focus of the critique of political economy from economic form to political (2014, pp.10-11). The second point relates to Bonefeld's sensitivity to the 'fire and blood' that sustains the value-form (2014, p.90). Understood like this, it is clear that the value-form does not 'come about...and maintain itself just like that'. Its 'reality is neither given nor assured' (2014, p.175). It is this negativity, and the concrete social relations it implies that makes possible both a practical programme of research around the topic, and the unpicking of the politics of contemporary labour. It opens out upon class struggle, the struggle to subsist, and the everyday lived experience of the violence of abstraction in the workplace. Thus, combining the classical NRM with the Open Marxist critique of value's abstract unfolding gives us a guide to the real abstraction of social form as it is undergirded in a set of identifiable practices and processes. As well as informing a wider theoretical critique of claims made in the postoperaist literature, this also avails us of a solid analytical basis from which to launch a qualitative inquiry into value and labour in the creative industries in Chapters 8, 9 and 10.

2.5. The Labour Process as Carrier of the Valorisation Process

The case study in the second part of the thesis focuses on the relationship between what goes on in the workplace and the forms it assumes and is determined by in and by virtue of the market. In order to research how what goes in the workplace relates to what goes on outside in the market and commodity exchange, it is necessary to take the perspective afforded by Bonefeld. Value cannot be seen only as an abstract unfolding uprooted from concrete circumstances. Rather, it is an abstract unfolding rooted in a contradictory relationship with the concrete conditions of its existence-conditions it at one and the same time thrives on and denies. Here I will explore how this relates to the concept of 'practical abstraction', and, in the next section, how this implies the 'sublation' of the social relations of production within the value-form, which, by researching, we can help retrieve.

A good starting point is Rubin, who sets out to 'reveal how people's productive relations find their expression in value' (1978). This approach does not 'take the concept of value as the starting point of the investigation', but rather the concept of *labour*. However, this does not mean that the concept of labour is either given or unchanged in its encounter with that of value. Rather, writes Rubin, 'we define the concept of labour in such a way that the concept of value also follows from it'. We begin from labour only to read it through the prism of value. The research at the centre of this thesis makes such a move, examining labour in the creative industries via an understanding of its imbrication in capitalist valorisation and the social relations of production that support it.

The key concept for how I understand labour through value is abstract labour. What my research seeks to do is embed an appreciation of abstract labour into a wider account of how we work and what work is like for those who do it, so that the concept of abstract labour runs through our understanding of the buying of selling of labour power, the wage, exploitation, time discipline, measurement and workplace control and resistance like the lettering runs through a stick of rock. This, I consider, is what Rubin means when he writes that we should look at labour only insofar as we do so with a conception of value that flows directly from it. Abstract labour, here, can be taken as what Geert Reuten (2005) describes as a 'placeholder' for value and money,

bringing those concepts into the study of work. It is, as previously defined, a mode of existence of something wider.

Abstract labour is distinct from the concrete labour practically expended in the sphere of production. It is the outcome of the commensuration and equalisation of diverse labours by means of the meeting of the commodities they produce via exchange in the sphere of circulation. But labour takes on an abstract dimension earlier, both before and during its expenditure in the sphere of production. In this section, I use the work of Chris Arthur to explore how. His conceptualisation of labour's 'practical abstraction' equates roughly with Gunn's 'empiricist abstraction', and captures the feasibility of a study of value through the study of labour. Whilst the abstraction of labour culminates in the exchange of commodities by means of money in exchange, Arthur gives an account of how this abstraction is practically formed in a preliminary sense in the realm of production.

Arthur contrasts the presentation of abstract labour in *Capital* (1976) with the earlier presentation given in Marx's notebooks for the latter, the *Grundrisse* (1993). In the former, abstract labour is derived logically from simple circulation, reasoned from the chain exchange-value-labour-abstract labour. But in the *Grundrisse*, abstract labour as a category is derived from the relations of capitalist production. This chimes with the historical reading offered by representatives of the Open Marxism school like Bonefeld, which the latter poses against the 'logical' understanding of value's abstract unfolding given in the New Reading of Marx. As Arthur writes, 'the *determinateness* of the category of 'abstract labour' is the outcome of specific historical conditions and retains its validity only within these conditions' (2013, p.102).

Whilst *Capital* in many ways gives a more sophisticated rendering of Marx's theory of value- and, as Marx himself suggests, we must analyse the ape from the vantage point of the human, treating his most final complete work as the most definitive- Arthur contends that Marx leaves behind certain insights present in the *Grundrisse* that flesh out our understanding of precisely how concrete labour is reduced to abstract in and by means of the value-form.

For Arthur, what Marx regrettably leaves behind in the transition from the notebooks to the end product is any idea that abstract labour possesses a 'practical truth' situated *within* capitalist production itself, rather than only in the exchange of commodities that follows in the sphere of circulation. In *Capital*, therefore, we find abstract labour at the beginning, but seldom thereafter. But, following Rubin's instruction to read labour in such a way that value follows seamlessly from it, Arthur uses Marx's work in the *Grundrisse* to explore the initial buying and selling of labour-power as centring upon a foundational abstraction that makes possible the positing of value in the first place.

Arthur reads Marx as suggesting in the *Grundrisse* that 'it is *capitalist* production which imposes on labour its determination as abstract (not simply commodity exchange).' This is because the whole process proceeds from the aim to produce 'wealth in its abstract form': value, measured by money (2013, p.103). Accordingly, the inputs are priced in this form of abstract wealth and this enables them to be 'posited' as value-bearing and value-producing. Thus labour, for Arthur, is already potentially practically abstract before production proper commences. This is for three principal reasons. Firstly, labour power is sold as the sheer potential to labour, rather than labour itself. It thus carries from the beginning a mentally abstract character.

Secondly, money changes hands in order to bring this labour power- this potential to labour- under the capitalist's ownership. This, as with other commodities, renders it a commensurate component of the abstract social relation between things that we call value.

The link between these first two points, as Arthur has it, is that whilst wage labour might appear as 'an array of specific jobs', as 'a source of value' it 'confronts capital as an abstract totality' to which the framework of socially necessary labour time relates as 'the time taken' by production at its average (2013, p.106).

There is also a third respect in which we can say that labour is abstract in advance of the exchange of the commodities it produces. Arthur writes that 'abstraction is not merely the conceptual result of a concrete totality of labours, but it is a reality when individuals pass easily from one labour to another indifferently' (2013, p.103). Workers move between jobs- within and without skilled trades and industries. The wage form through which the worker subsists, and through the capitalist acquires the worker's labour power, pays for the reproduction of a commodity- labour-power- via human existence regardless of specific application. The wage abstracts already from all concrete activity, and thus the range of jobs a worker has over the course of a lifetime, and the movement of workers as a whole between and within roles and industries, exerts an abstracting effect already, in advance of production and circulation normally conceived. In this way, unemployment is most abstract condition of all, tied as it is to the requirement to live through the wage form yet free of any specific sale or expenditure of labour power.

Situating labour's practical abstraction at the inception of capitalist production may seem to diverge from a reading of value as arbitrated ultimately in exchange. But rather, employing Rubin's call to interpret labour in such a way as value follows from it, what it shows is that labour power is engaged in production through a process of exchange, and from this initial exchange, of the worker's potential to labour for a wage, it gains a preliminarily abstract character. For labour to contribute towards creating something that eventually bears value, it must be bought and sold as a commodity, and itself validated as part of value's abstract social whole of all things with all other things. The validation of labour power as a commodity confers it a monetary status. It becomes practically abstract. This is key to its measurement and manipulation in the process of production. It is the precursor to the processes of measurement studied empirically in Chapters 9 and 10, and guarantees the continuing conditions of measurability on which the theoretical dispute with the postoperaists in Chapters 4-7 centres. Its validation as monetary and practically abstract creates the conditions whereby labour can be usefully engaged in the generation of a product that can, as a commodity, act as the bearer of the value relation.

The key concept here, for Arthur, is 'positing'. Arthur describes value-positing as 'the truth of the labour process', with respect to the status of the latter as the 'carrier of the valorisation process'. In this sense, 'the labour process is 'subsumed' under the valorisation process' (2013, p.104). This conforms with our reading of labour as continuous with the conceptualisation of value. One cannot confront labour without value, as the process of the former carries the process of the latter.

The whole endeavour begins with the positing of value. Value is not simply the result, but the intention. By validating labour-power as a commodity, its price- the wage- monetarily posits labour as an activity that carries with it a certain potential value. Arthur suggests that capital must 'posit' labour's status as such, positing labour as both value-bearing with the conferral of a wage on the commodity labour-power, and value-producing by positing its result- the product of labour- as a potential commodity that too bears value. Money is the means through which this abstraction is 'imposed'. And, thereafter, labour is calculable, workable and commensurable. Arthur writes that 'the concrete labour-process carries a distinct set of abstract determinations that posit value' (2013, p.104). What this gives us is a way of conceptualizing how value takes on a real existence in the workplace, despite its formally non-empirical status. It

makes possible a study of the material world of timesheets, time-tracking software and other such devices in the case study of creative labour, and sheds light on how they act as value-positing 'abstract determinations', as we will explore in the latter part of the thesis.

2.6. Denial and sublation

What makes the relationship between labour and value difficult- but also *possible*- to research is how the value-form denies and sublates the antagonistic social relations on which it is based. In his theorization of the practical abstraction by which valorisation proceeds in production and through which it is possible to comprehend the 'non-empirical' reality of value's modes of existence in production, Arthur conceptualizes how the concrete practice and experience of work disappear, in a denied but resistant way, into the social form of abstract labour in process.

As we have already seen, value, and the role of abstract labour-time in production, are presupposed on a set of social conditions whereby workers must sell their labour power to live. In the first place, workers must objectify their labour power to subsist, exchanging it for money- the wage- with which to acquire the commodities necessary to live. For this objectified labour power to be validated as part of the social necessary labour time of society as a whole, they must engage in production processes, the result of which is 'posited' as, and subsequently validated as, value-bearing.

Labour power, as the foundational commodity, has its value 'posited' at the inception of the labour process through its buying and selling. In a way, the positing of its value is the positing of the value of all that follows, although this is subject to the capitalist's initial expectation of accruing wealth in its abstract form- value, measured in money- upon the sale of a given good or service.

Thus, engaged in the labour process, workers produce not value itself- as has commonly been stated in vulgar accounts of Marx's theory of value- but rather that which bears or carries value- some useful or desirable thing to which value is attached first by positing it as valuable and eventually through its exchange for money in the market.

Two things happen here. On one hand, the very thing through which the worker subsists contradictorily impoverishes them, subject to social relations of inequality and domination. Secondly, the concrete labour in which they engage is *denied* in the abstract form of labour specific to value. This is how they live: subsisting through impoverishment, doing what is denied.

The labour process sees concrete labour eventually 'enter into' the value-form, Arthur writes, 'not as abstract labour but as abstracted *from*' (2013, p.109). This is an important distinction. It suggests, as Arthur asserts, the 'sublation' of concrete labour 'in the movement of positing value'. 'Sublation' here indicates the disappearance of the concrete labour workers engage in, and the denial of their experience of it, into the value-form, but with the retention of a moment of 'negativity' that offers the possibility of resistance. Lived experience and human 'doing' (Holloway, 2010) are sublated but never entirely successfully suppressed. This negativity persists because '[t]he value-form is *imposed* on labours as an alien universal identifying them *against* their reality as concrete' (Arthur 2013, p.109). Thus processes of measurement such as that I study in later chapters- billable hours and the timesheets that record them- abstract from the work creatives do and the way they experience it, structuring both in a manner that denies and negates the very impulses and spontaneity in which they are personally and vocationally invested. I reflect on this further and in greater depth in the Conclusion.

Thus, as Arthur contends, 'living labour realises itself in the mode of denial when reified in value' (2013, p.106). Labour attains the practical abstraction necessary to value 'only in its negation'. We are supposed to forget its specificity, its concrete character, in the exchange of commodities that depends on the commensuration of one with another. And, indeed, its specificity- the eccentricities, desires and particularities that make it what it is- must also be forgotten in the process of its quantification by means of timesheets, performance indicators and targets.

But this negation is a determinate one. It preserves, Arthur writes, 'in sublated form', that which is denied: value's positing in and through the labour process and the buying and selling of labour power as wage labour, with all the violence, coercion and dispossession that this relationship implies. 'Sublation' here indicates the simultaneous denial and preservation of this background (2013, pp.106-107). In capital, 'the concrete character of labour is thoroughly sublated'. Only the specificity of the particular useful form in which the commodity arrives preserves the specific character of the labour performed.

However, what Arthur does not emphasise clearly enough in his account of sublation is that this value-bearing product is posited much earlier in the labour process itself by measures and practices of abstraction. Despite writing of 'practical abstraction', there is little consideration given to what this may mean for workers themselves in terms of the practice and experience of work and how they can effectively resist against the sublation and denial of their activity. These are implications this thesis seeks to provide the resources to draw out in various different contexts.

I would contend that the sublation of labour is always in process and up-for-grabs, around which struggles and conflicts arise. In my research findings, reported later, the creative impulses of the participants are subordinated to systems of measurement, of abstraction, of value-positing- that constrain and limit the spontaneity and flow of their work, and in the process harm the very creativity on which the successful result of their labour depends.

There will thus always be negativity. Sublation is never complete, and there is always an 'excess' (see Dinerstein, 2015). Arthur notes that '[c]apital *wants* its production process to be frictionless, but, as forced labour, production retains the moment of negativity' (2013, p.107). Capital engages in its own struggle to negate this negation, which is nothing other than the denied desire and human dignity of the worker. The case study focuses on these struggles, from above and below, over the form and content of sublation and denial. By recognising through participant testimony what is sublated and denied in quantification, I thus upend the 'empty' time of abstract labour (Arthur, 2013, p.114) and attempt to retrieve the 'messianic' time championed by Walter Benjamin, the disruptive, jarring 'blast out of the continuum of history' (2004, p.257).

2.7. Conclusion

What this chapter has shown is that, despite impediments, the study of concrete labour *can* give us a vantage point on abstract labour and value, conceiving labour not as something leading up to value eventually, but as something through which value *moves* right from the start. It is this relationship that programmes of research based upon the immediate form of labour, but with no conception of the social form that labour assumes, miss. Concrete labour for these agendas is a self-sufficient subject of study with no reference to the role that it comes to take in capitalist social relations vis-à-vis abstract labour and value. The leap is not made from looking at labour to looking at value, both through and beyond the concrete activity that takes place in the sphere of production.

By conceptualising labour and labour power in such a way that value flows from them, we can glimpse the latency of value whereby value cannot be said to fully exist before commodity exchange but persists earlier in production as a potential quantity, stemming from the initial exchange of labour-power for a wage. This introduces the practical abstraction that makes the comparison, commensuration and exchange of commodities in the market possible. The latency of value- at first glance an ephemeral and non-empirical concept to grasp- thus can be seen to consist in the most brutal and material of circumstances: that a worker must live only by selling the one commodity they can call their own, their labour-power. Thus we associate the real appearance of value and the relations between commodities with the social relations of production and the 'actual conditions of life' (Bonefeld, 2016a). This embeds the spectral forms of value in human practice, subsistence and experience.

So, first, we have the historical circumstance that we cannot subsist except through the wage, on account of the continued state of dispossession of the vast majority of the world's inhabitants from the individual and collective means to independently reproduce the conditions of life. The things we need and want are accessible only as commodities acquired with money. From this circumstance flows the positing of labour as monetary, practically abstract and potentially value-producing. Value reduces to hunger, but is no less abstract and non-empirical for it. We subsist through abstractions. Thus just as one cannot research labour without value, one cannot research value without looking at labour and the social relations of production that compel it to occur.

In this way, the understanding of the latency of value vis-à-vis the initial buying and selling of labour power conforms to the theoretical framework developed thus far. Where the New Reading of Marx stresses the importance of exchange to the understanding of value, Open Marxism reinstates a focus on separation, coercion and hunger as the historical basis for the abstract unfolding of the value-form. Concurrently, the study of labour opens out, in a complementary rather than antagonistic way, upon the study of value as a social form. Although Arthur errs more towards the NRM theoretical tradition, he too steps away from the purely logical application of its central ideas as critiqued by Bonefeld. Arthur upends the characterisation of commodity production and exchange as something that, in its simple form, can be considered in isolation from capitalist social relations. What Arthur's focus on labour-power communicates is that one cannot divorce value from its actual historical context in a set of concrete events and processes- namely, primitive accumulation, and the situation whereby we must sell our labour-power to eat, but also, as we see in Chapters 7 and 8, foregoing economic conditions of commodity circulation and exchange.

Arthur thus challenges the simplistic account of value whereby the latter arises solely in exchange with no prior existence, latent or otherwise. Arthur asserts that seeing the form of value as the logical extension of a certain mode of producing things, naturalises production and restricts all change and social determination to the spheres of exchange and circulation. In this way, fully circulationist accounts prohibit the critique of work, the wage, and the social relations of production that are responsible for most of the immediate misery of capitalist existence. It is cast as an untouchable sun around which we orbit, regardless of the stress one places on the moment of exchange as an explanatory principle. But by reading labour through value, as Rubin recommends, we can critique work, the wage and the social relations of production through, and not in spite of, a form-analysis of the abstract social rule of value. This addresses the question: why, if I am interested in value, do I look at labour, when the determination of the former ultimately rests in a process of abstraction of which concrete labour is only a carrier? The answer, in Arthur's words,

is that '[p]roduction is form-determined when located in the circuit of capital' (2013, p.105). This is because 'new value arises in production under the impulse of capital to valorise itself', an abstract economic compulsion in the face of which capitalists, their functionaries and workers are equally helpless to resist. 'In this perspective,' Arthur writes, 'the capitalist production process is from the start considered as value-formed insofar as all inputs including labour-power are commodities purchased with money-capital'. By emphasising what Arthur terms 'the unity of production and consumption', such a circuitist perspective attains what the circulationist approach does not: theoretical resources with which to critique drudgery and exploitation, via the understanding of labour-power as a foundational commodity, with which value is initially posited. This challenges the circulationist derivation of value from a static account of how goods are produced and ways of exchanging them arise as if by magic. Along with critiques such as that of Bonefeld, Arthur reinstates history into the study of the abstract unfolding of value.

What is important for my analysis is that Arthur stresses the role of labour-power within rather than against the theory of the social validation of abstract labour. In line with Rubin's methodological prescription to interpret labour in such a way that value follows from it, Arthur views labour-power's relationship with the monetary abstraction as precisely the kind of social validation of a value-bearing commodity as value-form theory would see in any other exchange of a product for money. The difference is, as noted, a matter of where emphasis falls. One can give a rendition of value-form theory that elides labour and labour power altogether. But Arthur- in a way that complements both Heinrich and Bonefeld- here stresses the status of labour power as the foundational commodity of them all, without which commodity exchange cannot be considered at all. Without the buying and selling of labour power- of an inequality between parties consummated in a formally free and equal contractual relationship- no value could be posited to begin with. This rules out any characterisation of value's existence in pre-capitalist 'simple commodity exchange'. It is, as we have seen Bonefeld emphasise in his critique of the abstract unfolding of value conceptualized in the NRM, a historically-grounded category embedded in continually reproduced antagonistic social relations of production. Expressing the value-form in layman's terms through the comparison of the value and perceived workmanship of a nearby chair or table does not therefore quite capture what value is, without reference to the specific historical circumstance of capitalist society. It would be better to begin from the necessity to eat.

When we say that capitalist social relations of production- that one must sell one's labour and submit to employer domination over one's time in order to eat- are essential to the value-form, this is an essence that *must appear* (Adorno, 1974). The sphere of exchange is not a false appearance that needs to be 'got behind' in the sense of an illusion that must be overcome, but a real appearance in which the essence of things really appears. In this thesis, this plays out in the case study's interrogation of the veneer of measurability in the workplace, and the social relations of domination and subordination it obscures and contains. The material relations of life are not here hidden in the forms of measurement that take hold, but are expressed in a distorted fashion, that, as I will go on to discuss in the next chapter, only a negative-dialectical method can unpick.

3. EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

3.1. Introduction

The methodological underpinnings of my study are derived from what Werner Bonefeld calls the 'critique of political economy as the critical theory of society' (2014).¹² This recasts Marx's critique of political economy not as an alternative economic theory, but a demystifying explosion of the objective economic forms specific to capitalism. It focuses, methodologically, on 'the negative dialectics of economic objectivity' (2016a). According to Adorno, dialectics is the 'ontology of the wrong state of things' (1973, p.11). It decodes a world of real appearance, wherein things exist as themselves and something else all at once. It is, as Bonefeld (2016a, p.66) writes, 'the cunning of reason in a bewitched society'. Negative dialectics is the critical application of dialectics. It extends its cunning to the active 'presentation of the wrong state of things'. It demystifies a reality in which the results of human practice pose themselves above and against its performers. It explodes the economic abstractions through which humans subsist in capitalist society. It takes 'thing-like concealed relationships' and 'render[s] their immediacy transparent- as socially constituted things'. This helps us critically decode first, in Chapters 4-7, the changes in immediate labour content on which postoperaists base their prognoses, and, in Chapters 8-10, the 'apparently transparent' immediate forms of measure to which creatives are subject in their work, in order to explore the social relations behind them ignored in the first, and as we shall see, sublated in the latter.

The means by which we render immediacy transparent in this way is through an '*ad hominem* critique of political economy' (2016a, p.65). It is '*ad hominem*' in that it deals in the dirt of life, the 'muck of ages', as Marx (1845) puts it. It contends that our access to the means of life is mediated through the conceptual apparatus of economic categories. The *ad hominem* critique assesses these categories with reference to that which they sublate and deny. It suggests that this conceptual apparatus rests in our relationship with 'sensuous things'. This relationship, however, proceeds through 'supersensible' things. But, for Bonefeld (2016a, n.11, p.72), it remains the case that '[t]he actual relations of life are the non-conceptual premise of the economic categories' that constitute this 'supersensibility'.

We have seen already the tricky non-empirical character of value as an object. But we have seen also how it rests in human practice in such a way as to afford the ability to research it. Bonefeld gives us a basis to understand how to grasp the conceptual and empirical world this engages with. In a world of abstract economic forms, the subject disappears into the object. The research method employed here is an attempt to rescue the subject and let it speak. Bonefeld's theorization of how non-conceptualities are implied in conceptualities, and how the subject vanishes in economic objectivity, gives us a basis through which to research empirically the processes of sublation and denial covered in Chapter 2.

I outline the method by which this is achieved, which is through a rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 2004) of participant interviews with workers in the creative industries, geared towards uncovering those instances where the rhythms of their creative desire jar against the abstracting frameworks of capitalist temporality, which, as we saw at the end of Chapter 1, are 'unqualified by any natural rhythm' (Arthur 2013).

3.2. Ideology critique as social critique

First, I will outline the method used to, in Chapters 4 to 6, interrogate the claims made by postoperaists about immaterial labour and the crisis of measurability.¹³ According

¹² This section draws on elements published in Pitts 2016b

¹³ This section revises elements of the unpublished MRes thesis Pitts 2012.

to Richard Gunn (1989), rather than posing the question as to whether such-and-such is true, critical theory poses the question as to what truth itself *is*, and interrogates the validity of the categories upon which truth judgements are made. Therefore, philosophical questions can be said to deal with matters at a 'metatheoretical' level, or what Gunn calls a second- or higher-order type of reasoning. Distinct from this is the 'theoretical' level of the first-order, or empirical, kind of reasoning. The two work in conjunction. If first-order theory was to validate its own categories of truth, then, Gunn suggests, a 'vicious circularity' would result. The recourse to second-order 'meta-theory' bypasses this circularity. However, this does not avoid a second pitfall: *infinite regress*, whereby the second-order meta-theory itself needs validation from a third-order theory, and this by a fourth-order theory, and so on and on *ad infinitum*. Gunn contends that this dilemma can be circumvented in an alternative model of theorising, in which theorising is both theoretical and metatheoretical, and first- and second-order, '*at the same time*'. As Gunn suggests, this approach overcomes both vicious circularity and infinite regress, interrogating its own truth claims by questioning the validity of its categories and interrogating the validity of its categories at the altar of its truth claims (Gunn, 1989, pp.3-4).

It is exactly this mode of theorisation that is found in what Gunn calls 'Marx's theoretical 'totalisation'.' For Gunn, philosophy's separation of theory and metatheory into distinct spheres of intellectual activity was reconciled by Marx through his engagement with Hegel. The main grounds upon which this reconciliation is effected is by means of the denial that metatheory presents some separate 'conceptual realm' completely divorced from the first-order and empirical. Rather, from the Hegelian-Marxist perspective, practice is that to which theory *belongs*. The latter is a moment of the former. Gunn attributes to this Hegelian-Marxist reconciliation something he labels '*practical reflexivity*'. This is where theory reflects upon the validity of its categories with recourse to practice itself. In practically reflexive theorising, then, the theorising itself is included within the scope of the theorisation and is therefore its *object*, and the validity of its categories is self-analysed within the context of the social situatedness of its own existence as *practice*. Therefore, the three conceptual moves involved- theorisation of the object, theorisation of its presence within the object, and reflection upon the validity of its categories- are not separate stages of theorisation, but form a single simultaneous totality. Each element impacts upon the other, with consideration of the object immediately and at once consideration of the presence *within* that object as a 'totality of social practice'. Reflection upon the latter totality is therefore also reflection upon the truth criteria through which the social totality is understood. In this way, 'to raise metatheoretical questions is to raise social questions', and vice versa (1989, pp.4-8).

It is the theoretical/empirical quality of the abstractions that concern us that requires a practically reflexive, dually theoretical and metatheoretical approach, whereby the categories of truth are taken to be categories of the object of study and vice versa (Gunn, 1992, p.23). Gunn discusses this approach in terms of the necessity of both *first* and *third person perspectives*, whereby the determinate abstraction is third-person as 'part of a determinate social world which [...] goes on existing whether it is theorised or not', and first-person in that it can be 'engaged with and understood' (1992, p.21). It is such a mode of 'determinate abstraction' that makes possible immanent critique. As Gunn writes, '[d]eterminate abstraction's understanding of abstractions as *socially existing* allows it to mount an ideology-critique which is directly, and at the same time, social critique. To criticise ideas *just is* to criticise political relations; and conversely.' (1992, p.22). This is important now, at a time wherein, as we shall see in the next chapters, postoperaist ideas are being mobilised politically, in the UK at least, like never before, and wielding an influence in

policymakers in the process. By critiquing the ideas the world has about itself, we can critique that world in turn.

Critique need not be explicitly morally committed to one or another group of social actors in order to constitute what Harry Cleaver calls a 'political' reading (2000) situated in the 'urgencies of the class struggle' that Gunn suggests are susceptible to an immanent method (1989, p.14). In this reading, Marx's theory of value is a 'radical negation' of its object (Endnotes 2010). Rather than a 'positivistic presentation of capitalist categories', value theory must instead be thought of as 'their immanent radical critique' (Kurz, 1999, pp.1-2). Value critique conducted on such terms 'moves beyond a positive account of the concrete determination of profits, and becomes part of a critique of the very structure of possibilities in the existing society' (Wright, 1981b., p.74). Thus, we can restate Gunn's assertion that ideology critique is immediately and at once social critique with the addendum that the reverse, too is true: social critique offers the possibility of revolutionary political critique. It is such a critique that ultimately constitutes the method employed to review the literature presented the next few chapters.

3.3. The negative dialectics of economic objectivity

Following the theoretical critique of the claims of the postoperaists, I look further into the reality behind the claims they make about the changing world of value and labour through a qualitative case study of work in the creative industries using interviews and fieldwork. This looks behind abstract economic forms to rescue what Bonefeld calls 'the vanishing subject' sublated in economic objectivity.

The method for this is the 'negative dialectics of economic objectivity'. This permits us to access the non-conceptualities that undergird the non-empirical conceptualities of capitalist society via a critique of the objective economic forms through which they are expressed and governed. The conceptual forms through which live and subsist rule over the non-conceptual, most of all our needs and our humanity. As Marx writes, 'the individual carries his social power, as well as his *bond with society*, in his *pocket*. (Marx 1993, pp.156–7). The coin carries a concept, but also a material relationship of subsistence. The subject 'vanishes' in the conceptuality of objective economic categories. This is a particular situation, specific to our social conditions- a specific 'enchantment of the subject in its own world' (Adorno, quoted in Bonefeld, 2016a, p.65) dependent on the circumstances of that world of the subject's own making, but which, just as the results of creative labour take an alien existence over and above the control of the participants interviewed in the case study in Chapters 9 and 10, escape their own making to take on a dominating social form.

The object is the mode of existence of the subject, into which the subject dissolves. But this 'vanishing subject' disappears only to reappear as constituted and living through money in order to live and subsist. As Bonefeld suggests (2016b, p.24), if the coin carries our relationship with society, it carries also our own reproduction as living labour, in a world where the reproduction of labour power is the mode through which life itself proceeds. This is why, and how, in this thesis, the value-form can be explored through an attention to work, the wage, and the social relations of production. This latter is the non-conceptuality upon which the conceptuality bases itself, over which the conceptuality rules and, at the same time, through which the conceptuality expresses it, whilst simultaneously expressing the relations of the non-conceptuality at one and the same time. Economic objectivity 'entails the definite social relations between individuals as the vanished premise of its economic force' (Bonefeld, 2016a, p.64). This duality is decoded by negative dialectics.

Where the subject disappears into the object- with the latter standing in as the mode of existence of the former- only a dialectical theory can grasp this and adequately

capture the subject by means of an analysis of the object into which it disappears. This requires a grasp of contradiction only dialectics can offer. Contradiction, taken negatively, is the mode through which dialectics analyses the world. It appreciates that things may be one thing and another at once. And, in yet another sense, thinking through contradictions puts the mode of thought at odds with the world. But, at one and the same time, it too thinks against those contradictions, treating them critically as a part of the same false and wrong world of which they are a part. What a negative-dialectical approach does, therefore, is suspect, refuse and problematize all identity whatsoever, all positing of things as being of one kind, commensurable and in common (see Bonefeld, 2014, p.69). Only in such a refusal to accept things at face value can it get to the world's rotten core. In this way, bolstered by a critical historical materialism, negative dialectics restores the vanished subject- and, crucially for my research, what is denied in the objective economic categories that mark the procession of the value-form through society, which, in the case study, I attempt to dig up.

Herein lies the link between the negative dialectics of economic objectivity and the focus on experience in my research. The relation between conceptuality- the process I research- and the non-conceptuality behind it- the actual conditions of life uncovered in interviews- is accessed by means of a critical historical materialism, which turns the crude determinism of orthodox historical materialism on its head to 'open[] up the non-conceptual with the aid of the concept, without reducing it to the concept' (Adorno, 1990, p.65). This 'strips the blindfold from our eyes'- but, as Adorno notes, the 'concept is a concept even when dealing with things in being'- albeit one that 'is contained within a non-conceptual whole' (1990, p.12, my italics), in continuing modes of concrete practice and coercion. As I will assert in Chapter 5, this proves a radical counterpoint to the postoperaist fixation on change. Changes in the immediate form of labour do not imply changes in forms of abstract social mediation like value. Equally, changes in the value relation do not disclose changes in the fact we must work to live. Only dialectics- specifically in its negative guise- can grasp this.

3.4. The critique of economic categories

The research presented in this thesis, therefore, rests on a critique of economic categories, and not merely their passive acceptance or approval. The 'critique of economic categories' is, for Bonefeld, the aim of Marx's work. The latter reveals the origin of these categories in the social relations of production- in, for example, antagonism, hunger and violence. In so doing, it reveals the materiality of concepts and the conceptuality of the material world. For Bonefeld, the coin in one's pocket represents this relationship between economic categories and the actual conditions of life they express and to which they relate. The coin expresses and is concerned with this bond. But it also expresses a concept- the real abstraction of value- that cannot be separated from its constitution in the actual relations of life. The struggle for subsistence is as conceptual as it is material. The reality of life, in this way, is socially constituted through human practice

Because the selling of our labour power, and our living through and by the value-form, is our link to the means of subsistence, the abstract economic categories that dominate us exist through human practice, and not apart from it. The negative dialectics of economic objectivity suggests that the 'incomprehensible economic forces' that rule over subjects in capitalist society, as Bonefeld (2014, p.66) suggests, rest in human practice and can be explained through human practice. The 'relations of economic objectivity' abstract from lived experience. But they are also a mode of existence of the latter. Existing this way, economic categories represent an 'inverted and perverted world of definite social relations' rooted in everyday life. As touched on in Chapter 2, this practical and experiential aspect gives us our basis to investigate

value's non-empirical reality via the case study in the second part of the thesis. In decoding this, Bonefeld (2014, p.71) writes, citing Horkheimer, negative dialectics casts a 'judgement on existence'. It opens out upon political questions about the delineation of the good and right life in a wrong world. Far from mere theory, it constitutes what Alfred Schmidt (quoted in Bonefeld, 2016a, p.65) calls a 'conceptualised praxis', the implications of which I draw out in the next three chapters on postoperaismo, and reflect upon in the conclusion.

It thereby provides not the 'impoverished praxis' popularly associated with critical theory (Bonefeld, 2016b, p.237), but poses precisely the key 'question' of praxis: 'what really does it mean to say 'no' in a society that is governed by the movement of economic abstractions?'. This praxis consists in a method that critiques and negates what is, rather than seeking to prove anything about that world only so as to reflect that world back upon itself. But, in negating the world, by passing judgement, it also describes the way that world really is. If dialectics is the ontology of the wrong world, the 'cunning of reason' in that world, then *negative* dialectics is the presentation of this world in a critical light. And this negative-dialectical method is also a 'conceptualised praxis' that represents an intervention in that world on the basis that the conceptual is real and reality conceptual.

This, as we shall see in Chapter 4, differentiates it from Negri's postoperaist approach. The latter's immanentist conceptualisation sees all things as one. In so doing, it selectively affirms parts of the capitalist totality in such a way so as to ultimately affirm the whole. It reflects the world back upon itself, where critical theory breaks the mirror. In negating the world, by passing judgement, critical theory also describes the way that world really is. And this allows us both to research that world with a theory-led investigation of a concrete empirical case, and to wager some political reflections about this world in critical dialogue with other theorists.

3.5. Theory and practice in a world of real appearances

The criticality of the methodology rests in its refusal to accept at face value the economic objective forms taken by congealed social relations in capitalist society. This distinguishes it from traditional and quantitative approaches to social phenomena, that reflect the world back at itself by working with the same objectified economic and social forms that dominate us. Rather than sociology or political economy, the disciplinary status of the project stands outside disciplinarity as a piece of Marxist critical theory. What distinguishes this is its ability to ask questions across supposed disciplinary boundaries and grasp the totalising tendencies of capitalist social relations.

Neither sociology nor economics ask why society reproduces itself through the economic categories it does. The division between the two 'sets aside the really central interests of both disciplines (Adorno, in Bonefeld, 2016a, p.62). This is because, as Bonefeld (2016a, p.70) puts it, '[e]conomic reproduction is social reproduction'. On one hand, economics seeks to calculate the world 'with mathematical precision', whilst sociology 'fails to recognise' its reproduction through precisely such an economic objectivity (2016a, p.62). This is because it is detached from its object, unlike critical theory, which thinks 'in and through society' (2016a, p.70).

However, the exchange abstraction that the negative dialectics of economic objectivity presents 'lies therefore not [only] in the abstracting mode of thought by the sociologist, but in society itself' (Adorno, 2000, p.32). Thus the 'conceptualised praxis' of the negative dialectician bests the separation between thought, practice and reality implicit in the vocation of the sociologist. In line with Marx's 8th Thesis on Feuerbach, 'all social life is essentially practical', thinking included. As Bonefeld notes of Marx's

thesis, '[t]hinking is part of social life and all social life is essentially practical' (2014, p.60).

The negative dialectics of economic objectivity thus denies the divide between the theoretical and empirical implicit in much sociological research. The fixed divide of the two in this thesis is more a matter of formality than fidelity, merging as they do on the terrain of the practical and experiential existence of the abstract categories with which we work conceptually, and the real social and political existence, and material efficacy, of those concepts in turn. As such, the essentially conceptual process that I investigate in the case study, and the theoretical categories it seeks to illustrate, are not apart from the reality that each seek to describe, but part of it. Ideas are a material fact- the coin in our pocket, for instance, by means of an abstraction, arbitrates our access to food, to the means of survival. The idea that governs this- of the universal commensurability of diverse use-value by means of monetary exchange value- is as real and material as the hunger it mediates. This is what Adorno refers to when he describes the role of a *critical* historical materialism in negative dialectics. One moves through the concept to the non-conceptual, as each implies the other.

The conceptual abstraction studied 'holds sway in reality', as Bonefeld (2016a, p.68) puts it. The 'actual social relations' that persist at one level are not 'defied' by the 'independent economic forces' of capitalist society. The latter do not give the lie to the former, but are the *form of appearance* they assume. There are not two realities, but one, and it exists through appearances in which 'essence must appear' (Bonefeld 2014, p.63).

The appearances of the social relations of production in objective economic forms do not distract us from reality, but rather take on a real efficacy in reality. Our experience and access to the world really is mediated through a monetary schema composed of abstract economic forms. As Bonefeld writes (2014, p.59, my italics), individuals are governed by abstractions, and their life-circumstances *really are dependent* on the movement of economic quantities'.

Value is a 'real appearance'- a 'constituted social nature' (2016a, p.66). What this shows methodologically is that we can only work with the appearances available to us- in the case of the empirical chapters, the particular frameworks of meaning and representation used in creative agencies to understand and perform the work carried out. But these appearances are both appearance and essence. The latter must appear through the former. The objective economic forms through which we live: value, money, price, labour, labour-time etc.- imply the social relations through which they arise and hold. So, whilst refusing to take the concrete forms taken by abstract world of economic objectivity at face value, the critique of political economy as a critical theory of society permits us to take them at face value- but *critically* so.

3.6. Research Design

This translates into my research procedure. Empirically, I examine subjective experiences of choices and processes made about time, work, duration, value etc. This opens out onto the conceptuality of these decisions and systems of time, measurement and discipline- a conceptuality that, with the aid of the NRM, I locate in the abstract unfolding of the movement of the value-form. This conceptuality congeals in objective economic categories. Into this object the subject and its subjectivity vanishes. The personal motivations and desires of those involved, and the memories of the concrete activity that is abstracted from in measurement, disappear. My method aims at retrieving that which vanishes in the objective economic forms that govern work and life under capitalism. In this, I probe the 'non-conceptuality' that is both immanent with the conceptuality of the value-form and expresses this conceptuality. This 'non-conceptuality' relates to the 'actual conditions of life', the

'social relations of production', to which workers individually and collectively are subject.

My analysis of this non-conceptuality, and instinct for where to find it, draws upon the Open Marxist approach that Bonefeld uses to remedy the absence of struggle, coercion and violence in the abstract unfolding of value theorised by in the New Reading of Marx. That the conceptuality of the latter carries and is presupposed upon the former's non-conceptuality links the epistemological and ontological perspective of the study with both its theoretical underpinnings in the NRM and Open Marxism and its interview methodology, including the focus on uncovering instances where the concrete experience of creative work- of desire, conflict, and coercion- is distorted by measure.

In light of the above, the methodology and method used are united by a common understanding of the relation between concepts and non-conceptual material and experiential things in capitalist society. The study sets out to explore what lies behind the objective economic forms through which we live and subsist, and the practical and material world that sustains them. In so doing, it rediscovers the 'vanishing subject' that disappears in economic objectivity, in order to challenge the social relations of production the subject endures beneath the appearance of value and its measurement.

My method proceeds through interviews that rescue the vanished subject by allowing participants to recoup that which is elided in the realm of pure quantity established in the timesheet. I study the 'breaches' (Yakura 2001) that occur in the experiences of participants when this schema cannot order reality effectively in the framework of measurement represented in the timesheet, the targets and the modes of control to which works are subject. These breaches are uncovered through an interview approach inspired by Lefebvre's conceptualisation of 'rhythmanalysis' (2004), which focuses on the jarring conflict between the rhythms of human life and those of capitalist valorisation. Where these jar, the possibility of remembrance and reflection arises, and thus the possibility of rediscovering the subject that vanishes in economic objectivity.

3.7. Research questions

The research questions that guide the foregoing study are as follows. The research question(s) allow me to respond to a) the theoretical commitment to the critique of the objective economic categories of capitalist society, specifically as they relate to claims made about immaterial labour and the crisis of measurability b) the web of processes and practices one can witness in the empirical field itself, based on the testimonies of participants. The overall question that the research poses is *What does the practice of 'billable hours' in the creative industries suggest about the production of value?* In order to answer this question, it will be necessary to pose a series of subsidiary questions exploring the different dimensions and complexions that the theory of value assumes when applied to an example such as the creative industries.

- Based on the evidence in the case study, does immaterial labour create a crisis of measurability in contemporary capitalism?
- Is Marxian value theory still relevant for the understanding of contemporary labour, and specifically that of the creative industries?
- What does Marxian value theory suggest is the role of the creative industries in the circuit of capital, and how does this role impact upon the work that takes place in them?

3.8. The Creative Industries as Case Study

The creative industries suggest themselves as a perfect arena for a study of the theoretical preoccupations I have derived from the work of Marx, namely the reconstruction and reinterpretation of his theory of value away from labour and towards abstraction.¹⁴ In the first instance, and on a superficial level at least, their conditions are sufficiently different from the primarily factory-oriented production that Marx had in mind when he constructed what was later interpreted in its orthodox form as the labour theory of value. The creative industries constitute a very different environment and set of problematics than the predominantly industrial context in which Marx's theorisations were initially hatched.

There has been a tentative return to Karl Marx in studies of communication, media and cultural industries. Fuchs and Mosco (2012) defend Marxist analyses against Jean Baudrillard's assertion that Marx's theory of value cannot extend to culture and media. Against Baudrillard, the theory of value is not 'strictly homogeneous with its object'. For Baudrillard, this object is 'material production' (2012, 129). Rather, it extends to many fields. One such field is the creative industries. Nicole Cohen (2012, p.141) notes the way in which the dawning of the 'creative economy' has led to the unfair dismissal of the relevancy of Marx's work. Scholars do use Marx to understand the creative industries, Cohen notes. But they often draw upon the 'new' concepts so important to recent revisionist approaches. One such concept is the 'general intellect'. As discussed in the Introduction, and explored further in Chapters 4 and 5, this gained popular usage with the English translation of the *Grundrisse* in the mid-twentieth century (1993). Cohen (2012, n.3, p.142) is astute in highlighting that the 'old' conceptual apparatus, centring upon the theory of value, enjoys less favour. As we shall go on to see in the coming chapters, the uptake of the *Grundrisse* over *Capital*, and specifically the theoretical baggage that follows a narrow focus on the Fragment on Machines, has unfortunate analytical and political implications.

The 'old' Marx should not be so easily discounted. What this thesis seeks to prove is that a changing world of work by no means obstructs our application of Marx's categories to understand it. But theoretical work needs to be done theoretically to get to this position.

Marx considered capital through a series of abstract categories. This has secured his theory's longevity outside the immediate context and specificities of his time. Thus Marx employs a frame of understanding which pertains above and beyond its particularities. But to understand the particularities of our own time, we have to perform some work ourselves. This may sometimes involve leaving behind parts of Marx's theories, or illuminating new or misunderstood aspects. The study of the creative industries helps in this process of selection. It sheds more light upon some of the things that Marx was trying to get at than did the industrial work processes preoccupying his mature output. Indeed, the concrete capitalism that we witness in our day may be much closer to Marx's abstract model of capitalism than the concrete capitalism of his own (Mandel, quoted in Jameson, 2011, p.9).

In this sense, the creative industries, far from bringing into question Marx's theory of value, may allow us to do much more with that theory of value. The creative industries expose elements of the production and circulation of commodities opaque in the industrial work of Marx's time.

Further, creative industries, it may be argued, occupy a similar position in developed Western capitalist economies as did manufacturing in Marx's time. The writing of *Capital* was conducted in response not to the overwhelming quantitative prevalence

¹⁴ Elements of this section appear in published form in Pitts 2015a.

of factories, but to their increasingly hegemonic qualitative status. Factories were not the most numerous type of production, but seemed as if they would exert a hegemonic influence on how production in the rest of the economy would develop.

The creative industries and their working practices constitute a worthwhile object of analysis in the contemporary era precisely due to the possibility of their occupying a similarly hegemonic status vis-à-vis the economy as a whole, carrying a series of traits which display characteristics that, however tentatively, have a tendency to be adopted in other industrial contexts and circumstances. In this, graphic design, advertising and branding are among the most exemplary manifestations of the kinds of activities grouped under the banner of 'immaterial labour' by the postoperaists. Therefore, they are a perfect territory upon which to critically examine claims about immateriality and immeasurability, and open the case study in the later chapters from its specific setting outwards onto a wider field of analysis.

3.9. The UK and the Netherlands

The research features a cross-national comparative study between the UK and the Netherlands. The results highlight differences and similarities in the way that agencies and other similar kinds of companies in these countries operate. The value of using the two sites together should be seen in the context of the very different patterns of working hours found in the two countries. The study seeks to find out whether or not time is organized differently in the two countries, or whether the design industry has shared characteristics that can be seen to ignore national specificities. An examination of whether these national differences are either reflected or liquidated in each country's design industry will highlight the features that are specific to work and work-time in each context.

The creative industries in the UK and Netherlands are united by a similar concentration of design, branding and advertising agencies. Although they diverge radically on the amount of time spent at work, and the productivity of that labour, it can be seen that there is closer convergence in the creative industries in both places. This suggests they are useful comparators. Certain cultural differences abound around the relationship between work and life that bear influence in the results of the study. When considering the 'creative scene' in London and Amsterdam in which a majority of the study takes place, these differences play out in the specific kinds of labour conditions, job quality and employment status to which the participants in the sample are subject.

By looking at case studies in the UK and the Netherlands, the research incorporates an international element that may serve to highlight the specificity of working time patterns in the two countries, and to what extent the creative industries mark an area of convergence in these patterns. The Netherlands are an ideal complement to the UK in seeking to understand this, in that they possess a similarly high concentration of design agencies and other creative industries, yet display very different national figures on working hours.¹⁵ I will cover the surprising implications of this more closely in Chapter 8.

3.10. Data Collection

My analysis draws upon data collected over the course of 33 semi-structured interviews with people working in graphic design, branding and advertising agencies.¹⁶ 23 of these interviews were with permanent employees. 10 of the interviews are with freelancers. These latter form part of a separate project (a Short

¹⁵ See figures given in Chapter 8

¹⁶ A full breakdown can be found in Figures 9 and 10 in the Appendix.

Term Scientific Mission funded by EU COST Action IS1202 The Dynamics of Virtual Work) but the career histories and working conditions of the participants involved at time offer some interesting insights into the topic at hand. I also draw on company accounts freely available from Companies House to grasp the specific financial and economic trajectories at play in some of the bigger agencies studied.

Kuipers (2014) describes interviews as the 'obvious method for studying cultural intermediaries'. It offers an 'open-ended approach and richer data' than, say, a survey. Further, it allows informants to 'give their own account of their lives and their activities', from which researchers can gauge feelings, meanings and evaluations of life and work. But, moreover, it applies specifically to workers in the creative industries in that the method draws upon 'conversation[s] in which meanings and values are discussed, dissected and co-produced'. Therefore, the method displays affinities with some of the most important aspects of the labour performed by the research subjects themselves. With this, however, comes the downside that the interview method preserves the comfort zone of the creative, making it harder to 'penetrate' the participant's 'professional presentation'. Interviews with so-called 'cultural intermediaries' therefore tend towards the 'frontstage' and the overly polished (2014, p.55).

My approach sought to overcome this by provoking the participant into actively engaging with those occasions on which their expectations and self-understandings of their vocation were confounded and upended by workplace practices of timing, measurement and valuation, allowing them, and not me, to theorise critically about their work.

I also sought to overcome the 'frontstage' professionalism of the participants by complementing interviews with ethnographic elements: 'observation of and participation in the interactions and events in which cultural intermediaries take part' (Kuipers, 2014, p.55). Chief among these are 'informal social gatherings', Kuipers suggests. As she notes, much creative labour 'happens outside formal workspaces, and researcher should be prepared to follow their informants to other locales'. In the creative industries, as in many professional services, 'work and leisure are rarely strictly separated', so following participants to where they 'hang out' furnishes the research with additional insights no less important than those forged within a workplace setting. For example, I went to after-work drinks with participants and their colleagues in both London and Amsterdam. In Clerkenwell, London, Friday-night bars are thronged with people who work in graphic design and advertising. On pavements outside its busy pubs, I saw a slice of the social life that constitutes an integral part of the creative working week. Drinking on company accounts, designers and brand consultants swap notes on jobs, bosses and clients and trade tips for role openings and freelance opportunities. They talk shop, bond, gossip and moan with colleagues. My immersion in this ethnographic field, as Kuipers notes, allowed a greater grasp of what informants did and said in more informal contexts in interaction with other people in their situation. Here, 'the unsaid and the everyday' can become clearer, and what is said in interviews cross-referenced with what is said over a post-work beer.

Indeed, when interviews did take place on company premises, other brief opportunities for ethnography arose. Time spent waiting in offices was a chance to observe the careful choices made by a company in how it presents itself to visiting clients, how it organises its workspace, and how it displays workflow charts, schedules and timepieces. As Kuipers contends, presentation is key in the creative industries, and how somewhere looks, even in the most cursory glance, can say a lot about a company and its employees (2014, p.56).

My interview technique responded to empirical specificities and theoretical preoccupations. Kuipers suggests that cultural intermediaries possess an 'inconspicuousness' necessary to their jobs: their skill consists in 'making things seem artless and self-evident'. This extends, she contends, to research interviews. This can make it 'difficult to penetrate the smooth talk of these professional meaning-makers and image-builders', who carry off evasive answers with panache (2014, p.53). My interview method, therefore, aimed at breaking this seamless appearance, bringing forth tensions and contradictions in the work of participants.

By bringing to light and exploiting those occasions when the system of billable hours breaks down, by virtue of the essential incommensurability, contingency, irreconcilability or unreliability of people, processes or other aspects, my research invites participants to put distance between themselves and these practices. Thinking of Nietzsche's observation to the effect that 'the form of life epitomized by quantification depends on the art of forgetting' (Porter, 1994, p.396), my research attempts to bring to light *that which cannot be forgotten*- i.e. that which cannot be reconciled with the smooth functioning of these systems of quantification. That which cannot be forgotten, that which breaks the veneer of forgetfulness upon which the postulate of equivalence depends, has a political significance in struggles about what it means to be creative and to enjoy one's work free from the forms of regulation described previously. Politically, the project's aims and the importance of its contribution also relate to this attempt to remember that which is forgotten when we measure, count and value. To facilitate the remembrance of those elements of working life that stand out awkwardly and cannot be reconciled into the smooth quantitative space established by management is an act that carries with it a political commitment to fostering a critique of capitalist social relations from within the capacities of the participants themselves to question the counting and measuring procedures to which their work is subject.

I aimed, therefore, at breaches and ruptures in the participants' own experience of work. As Kuipers notes, the seamlessness of cultural intermediaries' own self-presentation is mirrored in the apparently impenetrable veneer of the work they perform. Largely cognitive and immaterial in nature, the work is hard to observe first-hand in a meaningful way without explanation: emailing, browsing, thinking. The 'work' element is not always easily ascertainable in what appears, at first glance, to be social and non-work related: after-work drinks with employees of a rival firm, lunches with clients. As Kuipers points out, we might even infer a type of hidden labour in a designer or strategist flicking through a magazine (2014, p.53), or indeed watching television, visiting an exhibition and so on.

3.11. Data Analysis

I analyse the interviews principally through coding transcripts and looking for instances of what Yakura (2001) follows Garfinkel in calling 'the breach', the moment at which the experience of the participant jars with the processes of control and valuation to which their work is subject.¹⁷ I look for such breaches using a method inspired by Henri Lefebvre's concept of 'rhythmanalysis'. Henri Lefebvre's rhythmanalytical method (2004) provides a template for the study of this dissonance between, broadly defined, capitalism and human creativity. Rhythmanalysis is the study of the rhythms and repetitions of everyday life (2004, p.73). It examines the different rhythms created when different social principles and practices meet. They produce either eurhythmy or arrhythmia depending on the success with which they interrelate. Creativity and capital approximate to two such rhythmic poles. Thus, in

¹⁷ Some elements of the section have been published as Pitts 2016c.

Chapters 8-10, I explore the various eurhythmia and arrhythmia that they generate (2004, p.20).

My rhythmanalysis proceeds by means of the testimonies collected through participant interviews. I use Lefebvre's method to examine the conflicting rhythms attached to the creative desires of the employee and the abstract framework of measure to which they are subjected by the employer. It allows me to study how creative autonomy is constrained within manageable, measurable limits, and the tensions that arise around this.

My data analysis picks out, on the one hand, patterns and recurring themes, and, on the other, tensions, struggles and conflicts. This is in line with Lefebvre's recommendation that one assesses rhythm across two variables: repetition, on the one hand, and difference or disjuncture on the other.

The interviews invited the interviewees' reflection on where the rhythms of their work jarred with the systems of measurement and control set in place by the firms for which they work. The interviews thus allow me to explore experiences of rhythmic conflict, repetition and difference. According to Lefebvre, disjuncture is something sensed and experienced, in either a bodily, physical or social, psychological way (2004, p.10, p.15, p.77). The interviews access participant experience at this level.

Rhythmanalysis as a method dovetails with the ontological claim made in this research. It plays upon the different understandings of time and rhythm present in critical literature on work in contemporary capitalism.

For instance, Sergio Tischler (2005) applies the understanding of human doing and its suppression and denial in abstract labour to a theorisation of the dual temporality of capitalist existence. He distinguishes between the 'time of reification' and the 'time of insubordination'. The former is the general 'uniform and continuous time' of capitalist valorisation (2005, pp.131-132). Labour must be, as far as possible, emptied of its specific content and divorced from its specific context in order to become measurable. This is abstract labour which entails the abstract time of identical hours passing.

Within this abstract time, however, there persists a latent time of 'struggle over the reduction of human creativity into profit' (Tischler, 2005, pp.132). On the one hand, this human creativity 'can be realised only within the framework of a form of power that is alien to it' (2005, p.133). This is because human activity in capitalist society is worthwhile and recognisable only via the process of monetary valorisation. On the other, human creativity resists its 'negation' in capitalist production (2005: 135). Even in its denial, this creativity manifests as what Tischler calls the 'time of insubordination' (2005, p.135). This human time of doing and creativity renders capitalist power unstable and precarious. As Tischler writes, 'human creativity is a scandal because its potential for dysfunctionality inserts uncertainty into the "well-oiled" machinery of accumulation'. At the same time, capital relies upon it. This reliance upon human creativity, however, 'negat[es] its purpose'. '[A]bstract temporality', Tischler writes, 'tends to annihilate creativity'.

Thus the capitalist negation of human creativity as abstract labour conducted in the 'time of reification' is marked by conflict and contradiction (2005, p.131). The conflict centres upon the distinction between two times, of reification and insubordination. This distinction allows us to consider, later in the case study and the conclusion, what Holloway (2002a, 2010) and Tischler variously call 'doing' or 'power-to', here synonymous with abstract labour and 'power-over', and the opposing times, temporalities and rhythms they inhabit. Rhythmanalysis, applied to the interview data

collected, enables us to interrogate how and at what points these different forms of activity and their attendant times and rhythms conflict.

3.12. Access and Sampling

This section will describe some of the practical aspects of how I went about securing and sampling participants. I initially attempted to gain access by contacting senior members of company hierarchies, in the expectation that their authority would help yield a greater quantity, quality and range of informants. Lower-level gatekeepers with whom I had personal contact through my social networks would provide me with the name of someone at their company capable of granting consent, and I would make contact, using the gatekeeper as an 'alibi'. As Kuipers advises (2014), the ability to name names is 'a common test of 'insiderness'' that assists with convincing research contacts of your status. Through this, I harnessed the support of 'sponsors' able to 'champion' the project to senior members of staff, emphasizing the value of the proposed research and providing a useful medium between myself as research and the most powerful sections with which the project must be authorized (Bryman and Bell 2011, p.428).

This did not always work out. As Kuipers accurately asserts (2014), the study of cultural intermediaries is frequently the study of elite groups: wealthy, cool, sophisticated, educated and enfranchised. Whereas the history of ethnography is characterised by researchers 'studying-down', descending from the academy to embed themselves in the lifeworlds of the oppressed and downtrodden, research into many kinds of professional services actually feature the reverse: a 'studying-up', focused on the carriers of 'status and power'. Access, Kuipers notes, is much easier 'when the researcher more or less automatically has the upper hand'. But, in my interactions with company top-brass, as a qualitative researcher with no prospect of generating concrete quantitative analysis, and no professional background or expertise in the industry itself, I began on the back foot. The 'expectant, wide-eyed attitude' employed by researchers in other situations served little use when 'studying-up' in the creative industries. The further up an agency's hierarchy I started, the less success I had. Largely 'unimpressed with university qualifications', unconvinced by the value of a piece of sociological research to their company's working methods, and perhaps suspicious of a critical research enquiring into issues around time and measure, these 'high-status informants' frequently exerted their 'power to block [my] entry into the field' (Kuipers, 2014, p.59).

This initial impenetrability may owe to the hectic project cycle of agencies, where at least one deadline is always pending and a constant stream of checkpoints await. There was little time to either entertain or allow the prospect of a researcher occupying a space in the office, taking people from their desks for an hour. But, as well as being 'busy professionals with (relatively) high-status jobs', cultural intermediaries, Kuipers reminds us, also 'deal with confidential information [and] transactions involving serious money' (2014, p.57). The roll-call of clients at the firms I researched comprised many of the top consumer goods and retail firms in the UK and Holland (see, for instance, Figure 8 in Chapter 8). The competitiveness between rival agencies for work, and the fluidity of clients and employees between them, imply high stakes in any leak of corporate information. An organised programme of employee interviews, granted by the firm, was therefore unlikely in most cases, not to mention a full-blown office ethnography, with access to meetings and so on.

As Kuipers contends, the difficulty of gaining access to creative firms concerned with confidentiality vis-à-vis competitors invites other approaches to entering the field. She suggests that '[i]t is more worthwhile to spend one's energy trying to get face-to-face meetings' (2014, p.55). I found this much easier. I did not have to seek the permission

of companies, after having been rebuffed several times. And people could talk with me outside the workplace, with the extra freedom this affords to speak critically of one's work, colleagues and employer.

I sourced the creatives involved in my study usually by means of lower-level gatekeepers with whom I had previous personal contact through my own social networks. These gatekeepers largely worked under the radar of their line managers and employers to act as champions or advocates of my research within their companies, putting me in touch with willing participants via email or face-to-face contact. Sometimes this involved participating in social events with the gatekeepers- specifically post-work drinks- to introduce myself and build a rapport with potential informants.

Reflecting Kuipers' experiences, the workers with whom I made contact were very willing to assist me in my research. Kuipers associates this with the professional necessity to be 'reflexive about their work'. They were used to talking and thinking about the trade-offs between creativity and productivity, money and art, freedom and conformity, as an everyday aspect of their work. Their careers progress on the basis of a strong personal brand, a creative identity reflected in a body of work, and as such they seemed accustomed to thinking through who they were, what they were doing and how it could be different.

My sampling of who to speak with was thus largely opportunistic and driven by a) an assessment of the likely 'theoretical yield' presented by particular participants and b) the 'snowballing' effect of contacting new participants through those who have already participated, and harnessing the collective contacts of the network of creatives I got to know over the course of the project.

3.13. Ethical issues

Although as discussed above my initial plan was to gain initial consent from companies as the main gatekeepers of the research, eventually it was necessary to contact individual participants only. This circumvented some possible issues relating to the privacy and anonymity of participants vis-à-vis their employers, and their ability to speak freely and honestly about their work. The overt nature of the research allowed the collection of 'informed consent' from participants via individual consent forms. Any ongoing usage of data pertaining to the workers was also set out in detail. Any intrusion upon a participant's domestic and workplace existence was considered and the participants were made aware of the exact time frame, purposes and limits of the research. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the project at any stage, and to request that any information they have provided be destroyed.

Where privacy and confidentiality are concerned, two principal questions arose. The first was as to whether the use of my data in the final research product would compromise any employee's position, either personally or with the company at which they are employed. The second associated question is whether participants will be guaranteed the necessary anonymity and whether the sample is large enough so as to be designed to protect the reputation of individual participants. As Bryman and Bell assert, sometimes sample sizes are so small as to effectively give away with a modicum of deduction the involvement of certain members of staff (2011, p.130). If this might be the case, participants must be informed of this and given the choice to not take part in the research. With these issues in mind, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of participants was of the utmost concern and therefore pseudonyms were provided for participant's names and the research sites. All data was kept on password protected computers and databases, anonymised, and anything containing

names or personal details destroyed after the completion of the project in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

As discussed It can be difficult to gain access to organisations and individuals as a researcher, especially when there is an underlying suspicion that the research may produce critical results, provoke employees to question aspects of their work, or constitute a wholly qualitative endeavour that provides little in the way of hard, quantitative insights that are useful to the business interests of the company. However, I was open throughout about the focus of my research upon working time and the system of billable hours, and emphasised the questioning nature of the research. I have taken careful steps to anonymise company names and locations in such a way as to make them unrecognisable. This has been necessary to ensure there are no ill effects felt from the often critical treatment to which their business practices and working conditions are subject in the analysis.

3.14. Conclusion

As stated, from the perspective of the methodology employed here, research questions aim not so much to empirical proof as critical intent. But the critical approach can produce new forms of truth. It is out of the construction of a new past through 'revolutionary nostalgia' that what Benjamin calls 'constellations' of truth are compiled (see Buck-Morss, 1977). These constellations bring together individual moments of verity and meaning in a way that combines them to generate real insight into the things themselves. The active *construction* of truth out of the falsity of the raw material of reality (its past and present manifestations) is therefore necessary in order to wager any firm claims about society and the world at all. In providing a space for participants to creatively recoup the social relations and forms of autonomous activity sublated in measure, such constellations are constructed and what took place reclaimed by those in the present.

If society cannot survive without forgetting, as Nietzsche suggests, then the remembering of the most banal contingencies and outliers that defy the easy demarcation, classification, and quantification of labour in the capitalist production process may extend outwards into a critique of society itself rather than only of its economic activity.

Through my interviews with creative workers and analysis of the denial of their desire to be creative in the appearance of their work as pure quantity, and in the abstraction from the concrete experience of work in number, I probe such contradictions and denials, and seek the antagonistic relations that their appearance simultaneously expresses and conceals.

4. FROM REFUSAL TO CELEBRATION: NEGRI & POSTOPERAISMO

4.1. Introduction

The work of Antonio Negri has been a vector for revolutions in radical thought. Specifically, the progression of his work charts the development of the 'Italian New Left' (Cleaver, 2000, p.64) from operaismo to postoperaismo. And, with it, a wider body of political and theoretical engagement grouped under the epithet 'autonomist Marxism' (Cleaver, 2011, p.51). His work with Michael Hardt, *Empire* (2001), introduced the world to this tradition in its latest stage of sophistication. And, far from a high-water mark, its influence has percolated since, bubbling over in its translation into UK left discourse via the new and vogueish 'postcapitalism' literature (Mason 2015a, 2015b, 2016).¹⁸

Operaismo was inspired by the proliferation of worker struggles in sixties and seventies Italy (see Cleaver, 2000, pp.64-77). Their actions and demands exceeded the narrow parameters of party-sanctioned political praxis. Operaismo's English rendering as 'workerism' misleads (Hardt, cited in Thoburn, 2001, p.92). It is not delimited to a kind of worker or workplace. Operaismo's application extends to other spheres of activity that, as we shall see, it rebrands as work. Empirically, however, the context in which it hatched drew its attention to a specific kind of work and worker. And the factory, more or less, was its location. Its analysis thus hinges on what is most significant at any given time for capitalist development. And, at the time of its inception, this was the factory worker. Specifically of interest was the antagonistic relationship these workers entered into with capital.

Postoperaismo takes this potential theoretical looseness of application to new terrain. New empirical conditions dictate a shift in focus. The 'post' aspect stems from the attention lavished on new forms of work and worker. Through the prism of operaismo, struggles of factory workers were hegemonic. But, in the transition to postoperaismo, the creative activity of new 'immaterial labour' (Lazzarato 1996) comes to the fore. The distinction from operaismo rests not only on empirical insights. After all, operaismo implied the application of its frame of reference to diverse fields of activity. But, crucially, a theoretical and philosophical shift attends the change in empirical focus. Negri's post-1980s output witnesses a move away from Marx, to read and replace the latter through the work of Spinoza. Out goes the working class, in comes the multitude. Out goes antagonism, in comes immanence. The autonomist lexicon pivots on Negri's move from operaismo to postoperaismo. It is this transition I explore here.

In the following, I trace these issues through the development of Negri's work, from his re-evaluation of Marx in his 1978 lectures on the *Grundrisse* (1992) to his later work with Michael Hardt (2001, 2004, 2009). In Negri's work with Hardt culminates a long engagement with Marx, and, latterly, Spinoza. It was Marx who suggested that 'human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape' (1993, p.105). And, we can read Marx along similar lines. Thus, 'the most developed is the key for the knowledge of the less developed' (Bellofiore, 2009, p.179). His most mature expositions of the critique of political economy went prior. We can approach Negri the same way. In the following I read Negri's development from the vantage point of the triumvirate of texts with Hardt.

¹⁸ It is worth noting here that there was an initial, earlier uptake of operaismo, the forerunner of postoperaismo- including the early work of Negri- on the UK left via the 'Revolutionary Socialist Feminist organization with a working class orientation' Big Flame (Cleaver 2014), and specifically through the translation work of Ed Emery, who, as Abse (2016) notes, was among a milieu from the group who followed Negri's journey to *autonomia*.

This illuminates a series of shifts. Firstly, Negri discovers Spinoza. Initially, Negri maintains a Marxian fidelity to the dialectic (Cleaver, 1992b, p.xxi). His reception of Mario Tronti's 'Copernican inversion' (Cleaver, 1992a) of class struggle is a hinge point here. This inversion posed the working class as the motor of capitalist development. As it revolts, capital reacts. New technologies, new working practices, follow. Negri finds in Spinoza a philosophical grounding for this that Marx cannot offer. Spinoza's immanentism has radically anti-dialectical implications. Class struggle drives capitalist development not antagonistically but monistically, at one with capital itself. Spinoza is a skeleton key for the reinterpretation of the working class as the 'multitude' that appears in *Empire*. Negri's turn to Spinoza takes place shortly after his 1978 lectures on the *Grundrisse* (1992). It is expressed fully in his 1980 prison writings on Spinoza, published in English as *The Savage Anomaly* (1999). Here I am most concerned with the subsequent stress it places on how Negri theorises social and political change.

Between what became known as *Marx Beyond Marx* and *The Savage Anomaly*, Negri served time in jail. This is the context for a 'radical break' between Negri's early Marxism and later Spinozism (Ryan, 1992a). In the former, there is still some concept of social mediation with which to understand the rule of value (1992, p.162). But the turn to Spinoza is a radical attack on the dialectical understanding of mediation, in the name of pure immediacy. With this comes an unravelling of any idea that capitalism consists in a set of abstract social forms. The roots were there in Negri's reception of Tronti's Copernican Inversion. But whereas the latter emphasised antagonism, Negri elides negativity to see only positivity. For Negri, liberation is possible in the present state of things. Where humans emancipate themselves, the world follows. This is as opposed to a picture whereby humans emancipate themselves by abolishing the present state of things. These theoretical leaps are made only in light of an abandonment of a Marxian critique. The negativity of the latter exposes the limits of the possibility of liberation within the shell of capitalist society, as we shall see.

The rejection of a Marxian critique goes hand-in-hand with another shift in Negri's approach. Negri's background is in the radical autonomist *refusal* of work (Cleaver, 1992a, p.130). This refusal is still voiced clearly in *Marx Beyond Marx*. But by *Empire* we find Negri, with Hardt, celebrating work as immanently creative, cooperative and communicative, and, crucially, productive of an immeasurable plenitude of value. As Noys writes of this shift in emphasis, 'Negri's earlier, violent emphasis on the necessity for the negation of labour through workers' counter-power in the forms of refusal becomes magically recoded as the expression of an unlimited positive power' (2012, p.116). The discovery of Spinoza is handmaiden to this transformation of Negri's work. Spinoza's philosophy forces focus on the immanent power of human creativity, desire and democracy. This allows Negri to suspend the antagonism with which the operaist tradition typically tarried.

These shifts show how it is possible to separate Negri's later postoperaist output from its operaist origins. In the following, I conduct a critique principally focusing on Negri's work with Hardt. But in so doing I refer back to the transition in how Negri understands value, labour and capitalism. This relates firstly to his influences in Italian operaismo, and, secondly, his own work on the *Grundrisse*. Later output diverges from these bases. Looking at his body of work and its inspiration in this way brings into relief the philosophical and empirical shifts. Most importantly, it exposes the political imperatives that undergird this theorisation. And it affords resources for responding to their resonance today.

Negri's Spinozism takes all things as a singular monad. But negative dialectics encounters reality through its contradictions. As we saw in Chapter 3, contradiction, alien to Negri, is the mode through which dialectics analyses the world. It appreciates

that things may be one thing and another at once. A negative-dialectical approach problematizes all identity whatsoever. It thereby runs against the grain of Negri's Spinozism. It suspects all positing of things as being of one kind, commensurable and in common (Bonefeld, 2014, p.69), a critique of equivalence central to the method employed in the case study in Chapters 8, 9, and 10. This critique of capitalist society is something that, the further from Marx he travels, the less equipped Negri becomes to match. But only in such a refusal to accept identity at face value can theory get to capitalism's rotten core. This consists, for Bonefeld, and crucially for our approach, in one component above all others. Namely, that the results of human practice, of human creativity, come to assume an alien force over us as capital, a state of affairs I relate to the specific empirical case studied in the later chapters, reflecting further in the conclusion to this thesis.

This irony cannot be appreciated in the confines of postoperaist theory. In the foregoing, I suggest that in Negri's embrace of immanentism leads him to see the best in human practice. With immanence disappears any dialectics capable of comprehending the character of the abstractions and contradictions that rule over us and through which life in capitalist society by necessity proceeds. This leads to a political appraisal of the present that celebrates novelty and positivity. It sees the multitude as one with a world created in its image. In so doing, it suggests, affirmatively, that human practice exists for itself in this world and not the next. This dispenses with the dispassionate critique of capitalist society. It assumes the withering away of the abstract rule of capital and the social relations it applies. But these persist along the lines Bonefeld suggests- as the result of human practice that is not for itself. Our creativity, Negri has us believe, is uncomplicatedly positive and liberatory. And so too is capitalist development which trails in its wake. But negative dialectics refutes the positing of identity. In a capitalist society, the things and relations we create coerce us, mediated in the value-form. And, as I show in the empirical chapters at the culmination of this thesis, creativity cannot be uncritically cited as a realised quantity in capitalist society, but always exists in a mode of being denied.

Negri's post-prison output lacks any perspective from which to grasp this. A politics follows, conceptually stuck within capitalist social relations and their forms of appearance. The overarching charge Negri faces in that of what Benjamin Noys labels 'affirmationism'. This Noys defines as that political and theoretical imperative that 'affirms the creation of unashamedly metaphysical ontologies, the inventive potential of the subject, the necessity for the production of novelty, and a concomitant suspicion of the negative and negativity' (2012, p.ix).

It is the present-day percolation of this politics that makes the critique here important. The same positivity and optimism today instil an undisappointable hopefulness in the left. This celebrates popular power and the potential for a high-tech postcapitalism. It sees in capitalist development always the unfolding of human emancipation. But by mischaracterising capitalism to begin with, it elides emancipation's obstacles. I will return to this in the Conclusion of the thesis. Here I seek the roots of this in Negri's philosophical development, generating resources to rethink these assumptions today.

4.2. Negri's turn to immanence

In this section, I will chart the theoretical motivations of Negri's turn to immanence. It occurs over three texts in which Hardt and Negri set out the new global order of 'Empire'. Synonymous with globalisation, Empire witnesses the breaking down of borders and the concentration of power in a single, diffuse locus. In this new social formation Hardt and Negri contend, power is immanent. No more the transcendental power of imperialism (Hardt and Negri, 2001). In Empire, power rests in the constituent force of *multitude*, to which Empire reacts. This new revolutionary subject

drives capitalist order from one paradigm to another. It does so through its autonomous activity. Capitalist power can only respond to multitude's unencumbered self-valorising creativity (Negri, 2008, pp.32-48), whereas, as we will see in the case study, it is in fact capital that structures and stifles it.

Multitude is bound by a productive identity associated with empirical changes in labour. With 'immaterial labour' (Lazzarato, 1996)- a transformation it impels- multitude comes into its own. But despite this productive identity, Hardt and Negri disavow the traditional Marxist proletarian subject. The multitude lacks a deterministic relationship with the forces of capital. It is an independent and self-sufficient figure, whose own agency effects change within labour. The paradigmatic figure of the white, male manual worker makes way for a multifarious, mobile body of 'singularities' (2001, p.53). But the connection between change and production remains. Despite protestations to the contrary, Hardt and Negri posit the revolutionary upheavals of our time squarely in production, broadly defined. And this is not unproblematic, as I show in Chapter 5.

The development of the multitude propels that of Empire not from without, but from within. The two are synonymous. Empire springs from the reconfiguration of world order around 'proletarian internationalism' (2001, pp.51-52). Power globalises as the growing mobility and strength of labour leans against the limits of the old order. The multitude's boundlessness thus precipitates an extensified and intensified world market. This account of capitalist change poses resistance as productive. It casts the latter as 'entirely positive', compelling capitalist progress (Noys, 2012, p.106).

Noys locates in this a certain 'affirmationism'. Seeing development as springing from the multitude as a positive force affirms that development. Today, this matters politically to how the left approaches the present. Popular power is portrayed as an already-potent and pre-existing principle. The world, it is claimed, can and will change. But the people- read 'multitude'- leads the charge. This induces affirmation of those changes. And bestowing undue influence in the hands of human practice, it affirms the world that springs from it. This undermines criticality of thought vis-à-vis capitalist social relations. And, I will suggest next, it indicates a divergence from Negri's operaist theoretical formation.

4.3. Self-valorisation and the creativity of desire

In some ways, Hardt and Negri's account bears traces of its origin in operaismo. Relating capitalist development to the multitude's desires and mobility, they refract Tronti's 'Copernican reversal'. The latter turned capitalist development 'on its head' (Tronti, quoted in Noys, 2012, p.106), seeing capital following where working-class struggle leads. Contemporaneously, Panzieri sought to articulate how state policy expresses this inverted relationship. Schemes like the New Deal were a recurring topic of interest in the operaist tradition (see Cleaver, 2000, pp.65-66). They showed, writes Cleaver, that 'the only unplannable element of capital is the working class', to which capital must always react.

Operaismo championed the working class's revolutionary capacity to act in advance of capital. This was an attack on the legacy of the first-generation Frankfurt School. Operaists saw the latter conceiving only capital's capacity to order society in its image (Cleaver, 2000, p.65-66). But, as described in the previous chapters and applied throughout, my perspective differs. The legacy of Adorno and his associates is not to ignore human practice in favour of pure domination. Rather it is to illuminate the contradictory situation whereby human practice takes dominating forms. The roots of Negri's postoperaist divergence from this critical orientation thus lie in operaismo, and it is in the space opened up that my own critique operates.

These insights were not only theoretical observations. They opened out upon political and organisational struggle in Italy at the time. For operaists, the 1960s Italian labour movement was implicated in a Keynesian productivity compromise. In return for greater productivity, workers could expect to receive a greater wage. But crucial for the operaist analysis of class struggle was the breakdown of this compromise. Wage demands exceeded productivity at precisely the point a refusal of work threatened its foundations (Cleaver, 2000, p.68). The breakdown of the Keynesian compromise is crucial in the development of autonomist Marxism. It induces Negri to collapse the distinction between economics and politics. Struggles around economic life need no longer be mediated through politics. They become directly political themselves.

This reappears in *Empire* as the capacity of multitude to strike directly at the heart of global order. This is immediate, unmediated by the abstract social forms a critical Marxist perspective identifies. The immediacy of this struggle hinges on new empirical conditions. Immaterial labour undermines all metrics and measures of work, pay and productivity (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p.113, pp.402-403; 2009, p.135-136). There are no bases on which to arbitrate competing claims over production. On one hand, control and value capture move from production to the 'immaterial basin' (Lazzarato, 1996) of life itself. And, in turn, the location of struggle shifts from production narrowly defined to a broader politics of everything.

These struggles looked slightly different to the early operaist pioneers. They were interpreted as concerning the expansion of the sphere of working-class needs. These expanded to the ultimately destructive extent of exploding capitalism's contradictions. Thus, the theorised the wage not as a means of exploitation, but as an 'expression of working-class power' (Cleaver, 1992a, n. 54, p.142). The wage appears as the 'working-class power to impose its needs'. And, moreover, these needs- and thus the level of the wage- are subject to struggle (Cleaver, 1992b, p.xxiv). The working-class- later the multitude- exerts an excessive effect on the ability of capital to capture and control. In postoperaist hands, this eventually becomes the catalyst for a 'crisis of measurability' (Hardt and Negri 2001, p.113, pp.402-403; 2009, p.135-136). I critique this concept in Chapter 6.

As I note in Chapter 5, operaist and postoperaist iterations of Marxism reflect empirical changes I later unpick in the case study. The reconceptualisation of Marx advance according to posited shifts in society. This method is clear in Negri's reading of Marx's *Grundrisse*. From the context of Italian labour struggles, Negri applies the expansion of needs to the labour theory of value. Negri suggests that as the 'sphere of needs' expands, so too do labour's sociality and abstractness. Thus the secret of abstract labour is that 'work creates its own needs and forces capital to satisfy them' (1992, p.133).

The theoretical approach I adopt here, outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, sees value theory differently. Abstract labour sublates concrete need and experience. It does not express it in a positive relationship. The seeds of Negri's positive appreciation of capitalist development are thus already present. Abstract labour is not a dominating force. Rather it expresses the irrepressible desire of workers. Negri's analysis absents itself from the critical negativity crucial to Marxian critique.

In this, Negri also diverges from the operaismo behind the theory of the self-expansion of needs. In Tronti's Copernican Inversion, there still held a negative moment of antagonism and struggle. The working class drives toward the destruction of capitalist rationality and social relations. But, in Negri, this 'destructive character' is discarded. We get, instead, a celebratory treatment of the positivity and productivity of working-class power (Noys, 2012, p.109). This is already there in Negri's 1978 lectures on the *Grundrisse*. And this later appears as the constituent power of the multitude.

Rather than negating capitalism, the multitude promises to deliver its resolution from within.

Negri's divergence from, say, Tronti and Panzieri occurs on two axes. The first relates to periodisation. The moment of conflict between working-class needs and capitalist rationality moves. Tronti and Panzieri see this as something in motion. Needs expand outwards. Eventually, the ability of capital to satisfy them becomes so weak as to usher in a kind of communism. The full unfolding of those needs can then be realised and fulfilled. Negri, in his lectures on the *Grundrisse* (1992), largely pays lip service to this reading. But things look different as Negri's work develops with Hardt. The unfolding of these needs seems fully realised in the present. In *Marx Beyond Marx*, Negri enthuses about the prospect of 'the abolition of work' (1992, p.160). By *Empire*, this is realised already in a 'spontaneous and elementary communism' (2001, p.294) coexisting within contemporary capitalism itself. Today, leftist dreams pervade of a similar liberation within the confines of the current system. And it is to Negri that at least part of their appeal owes. The case study suggests that even at the precipice of the changes these affirmationist accounts posit, this rosy prospectus is nowhere to be seen.

For Hardt and Negri, the incipient liberation they practice comes courtesy of the multitude's constituent power. This is a recoding of operaismo's chaotic and 'unplannable' working class beyond command. The key for this recoding was a radical immanence derived from Spinoza. The antagonism politically and theoretically at the centre of the Copernican Inversion recedes. There is no external position from which to antagonise. The multitude positively pushes against the limits of capital with new needs and activities. Capital adapts to capture the immeasurable value produced. There is here no external position, or radical alternative outside the bounds of the present state of things. This constituent power springs from within capital. The multitude is immanent within, not transcendental to or in contravention of, global order. Although spontaneously creative and autonomously organised, it is at one with capitalism (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p.83). Its development is that of capital. It is the motor, not the halt-cord, of the present state of things. Things move in singularity, in symbiosis. In this, Negri's postoperaismo breaks clearly with the struggle-oriented operaismo of his antecedents.

The implications of this become clear only with Negri's embrace of Spinozist immanentism. But there is a thread of continuity in Negri's thought on this point. Spinozist 'creativity of desire' (Hardt and Negri, 2001, pp.51-52) simply substitutes for Marxian self-valorisation. Earlier, Negri attributes to the working-class- from Tronti and Panzieri's 'inverted' perspective- the power of self-valorisation (Cleaver, 1992a, pp.128-9). The working class produces in a 'self-defining, self-determining' way, 'autonomously from capitalist valorization'. As Cleaver writes, Negri suggests that it surpasses 'mere resistance to capitalist valorization'. It amounts to a 'positive project of self-constitution' instead. It is clear here that Negri is toying with concepts of the multitude and the crisis of measurability. Perhaps cognizant of a basic irreconcilability with the letter of Marx's law of value (see Chapters 5 and 6), Negri sought new conceptual glue in Spinoza. In Spinoza, Ryan tells us, Negri found a 'justifi[cation] for his own political and philosophical position'. The theoretical discourse of potential against power and 'world-constituting practice' (Ryan, 1992b, p.216) grounded the re-evaluation of Marx in a political project. And this has implications for how we think and talk about contemporary labour, as we will see in the next section and explore further in the latter part of the thesis.

4.4. From the refusal to the celebration of work

This theoretical shift also saw a change in emphasis from the refusal of work to its celebration. The analysis of self-valorisation related to the understanding of Italian worker struggles. The wage-productivity compromise was undermined by work refusal. 'Self-valorisation' stepped in to conceptualise how workers autonomously organised against and beyond labour. But with Hardt, Negri moved on from this. Immaterial labour and the 'creativity of desire' indicated the possibility of a liberation *through* work (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p.395). Once again, this realises a direction of travel projected in Negri's earlier work. As Cleaver asserts (1992a, p.130), his use of self-valorisation to read the *Grundrisse* already half-displaced work refusal.

Workers, Negri suggested, autonomously expand abstract labour in line with their needs and desires. Thus their development and creativity was tied up with work in an unacknowledged way. Value is not conceived of as an alien force against workers, but expressive of something essential and not socially specific. To refuse it is to refuse the positive essence it expresses. The discovery of immanence facilitates the full realisation of this perspective. Life is one and the same with work. Liberation is wrought only within this singularity. And so, by *Empire*, the break with refusal is complete.

For Hardt and Negri, the multitude produces value autonomously. This might happen within capitalist production. But capital is capable only of capturing the value the multitude creates- not controlling it. The move towards immaterial labour occurs owing to the multitude's creative and communicative drives. Capital trails in its wake. And the multitude's constituent power generates conditions for an incipient communism. The cooperation enacted through work crafts the multitude as a Spinozist singularity (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p.395). And with it, remodels the world. This happens *through* and not against work. Labour, redefined as synonymous with life, is affirmed along with everything else under the sun. But as set out in Chapter 3, I launch a critique from a benchmark of truth, and the truth is that capitalist society is negative, not as a matter of opinion, but as really functioning around negation. Illustrating this negativity, in Chapters 8, 9 and 10, we see empirically how creative autonomy is structured and constrained by capital, and not the reverse as suggested by Negri.

For Negri, Work becomes easier to celebrate once reconceptualised as synonymous with life- and vice versa. The concept of self-valorisation makes this possible. But this intersects with another element of the operaist inheritance. This is the theorisation of the 'capitalist tendency to widen its valorization to the entire "social factory"' (Cleaver, 1992a, p.131). The social factory was initially and most notably defined by Tronti. He contended that 'At the highest level of capitalist development social relations become moments of the relations of production, and the whole society becomes an articulation of production. In short, all of society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over all of society' (Tronti, cited in Cleaver, 1992a, p.137).

As Cleaver (2000, p.70) notes, this reconceptualises work beyond the confines of the four walls of the factory. It situates it instead in society as a whole. This initially related to, for instance, reproductive work that makes labour-power possible. Or, indeed, to the activities of the reserve army of labour that capital depends upon in vital respects. Negri's initial delineation of self-valorisation pointed towards this politically potent context. It chimed with contemporary conflicts around social reproduction, unemployment and the exploitation of women. But in the development of Negri's work with Hardt it gained new resonances. These resonances carried beyond the context

of contemporary struggles. Originally, the social factory concept drew an analogy between life outside the factory and the work inside. But, gesturing to the new immaterial labour, Negri goes further. In Tronti, society becomes a factory. Life becomes like work. But in Negri, the factory becomes *social*. Work becomes more like life. The workplace becomes where workers realise a spontaneously cooperative productivity.

Of course, the other aspect is there too. Outside the four walls of the factory, Hardt and Negri see ever further spheres of life put to work. Capital recoups, after a fashion, their autonomous, self-directed creativity in the framework of value. But the social factory concept, in the hands of Tronti, had an antagonism at its heart. The factory signified exploitation, class struggle. But with work under immaterial labour recoded as creative activity, this underbelly disappears. Hardt and Negri steal work from the antagonistic context in which it sits in the theorization of the social factory. The multitude realises itself within the newly socialized workplace. And this realisation exceeds, rather than conforms to, the capacity of capital to control and capture it. This is because the changes in the workplace are created by the multitude's own momentum. With all things one and the same, how could the world defy the multitude's inherent positivity? What I think this ignores is that the factory form still persists, an observation to which the analysis in Chapters 9 and 10 of how the Taylorist time management described by Sohn-Rethel in Chapter 1 relates to the example of the creative industries bears witness.

4.5. Subsumption and Immanence

In Negri's later work, a Marxist hangover remains linking the social factory with immanence. This is the concept of real subsumption. Marx theorises the movement from formal to real subsumption in the 'lost sixth chapter' of *Capital*, 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production' (1990, pp.948-1084). This movement represents an intensification of capitalist valorisation synonymous with the world market. Once the latter reaches completion, capital cannot extend its power. There are no conditions for expansion such as those presented in imperialism. In *Empire*, power plumbs deeper into the fabric of life instead (2001, p.225, p.329). For Negri, this was expressed in the implication of the social within the factory and vice versa. The logic of the factory seeps out of its spatial and social boundaries into society as a whole. Its rule is no longer transcendental but absolutely immanent. And it works within the bodies and brains of the multitude, who in turn are immanent within *it*. Real subsumption realises empirically that which Spinoza's immanence indicates philosophically: one, single, social substance (2001, pp.255, 329, 403). With real subsumption, Hardt and Negri write, capital 'operates on the plane of *immanence*, through relays and networks of relationships of domination, without reliance on a transcendent centre of power' (2001, p.326). The basis for this empirical leap are the new forms of 'socialised labour' (Negri 2008, p.44). Real subsumption proceeds through labour's intensified exploitation on the terrain of human life itself: emotion, cognition, communication, knowledge, language and affect (Hardt and Negri, 2004, pp.107-109). The advent of immaterial labour verifies Negri's philosophical shift to immanence.

Radical immanentism militates against dialectics or contradiction. This restructures the horizon on which struggle is seen to ensue. The dispersal of power across and ever deep *into* society means that the multitude struggles at all times and in all places. Although social, this struggle still concerns production. Immaterial labour takes place everywhere, and so all struggles mobilise around it. But the immanence of multitude and its activities in a world of real subsumption mean that '[t]here is nothing dialectical or teleological about th[e] anticipation and prefiguration of capitalist development by the mass struggles' of the multitude (2001, pp.51-52). There is no

external or antagonistic principle. Struggles come squarely from within the fabric of immanence.

This has political implications. Under real subsumption, politics is possible only on the field of immanence. It strikes out within the limits of a singularity. There is nothing beyond it. It therefore affirms only what already is. That the theorisation of subsumption and immanence should resolve itself so is of a specific moment. As Noys notes, Hardt and Negri write *Empire* with 'capitalism rid of even its intra-systemic rival', a capitalism 'unleashed'. With no systemic point of negativity, Noys suggests, a series of 'affirmationist' theories arose, of which postoperaismo is just one. Capitalism free of external challenge, immanence offered itself as a way to see the world. And with this, subjective actors within a single 'ontological fabric'. There is no Other, no antagonistic or utopian perspective from which to meet the present. Negri's Spinozism, therefore, gains succour from the historical circumstance that there seems no alternative. But, rather than facing up to this negativity with a politics of negativity, it pitches instead a politics of unrelenting positivity, out of step with the parlous situation in which we find ourselves.

The theorisation of multitude and the concept of immanence support specific political outcomes. As Hardt and Negri write, 'every liberatory initiative, from wage struggles to political revolutions, proposes the independence of use value against the world of exchange value, against the modalities of capitalist development- but that independence exists only within capitalist development itself' (2001, p.185). At singularity with multitude and its desires, society is affirmed as is. We can hear this echoing in the hopeful pronouncements of populist postcapitalism today. I will now examine the specific philosophical dimensions undergirding this affirmative politics.

4.6. Transcendence, mediation, dialectics

The claims about self-valorisation, the social factory, and subsumption are empirically-grounded. But the immanence with which Negri eventually binds them implies certain philosophical assumptions. Here, the divergence from Marx becomes clear. In embracing immanence, Negri lashes out against transcendence, mediation and dialectics. Each, in their own way, are crucial to the negative dialectic approach to the critique of political economy outlined at the outset of this chapter. And their rejection forecloses analysis of certain aspects of actually-existing capitalism. Without them, Negri can only wish into existence a capitalism that does not exist. This wishful thinking pervades the influential work of Negri's inheritors today.

Their immanentism collides Hardt and Negri with the whole edifice of dialectical thought. Spinozism acts as a political and theoretical benchmark banishing transcendence from the analysis of capitalism. As Ryan writes (1992b, pp.217-218), 'Spinoza is radically anti-transcendental.' Negri's Spinozism refutes any dialectic that 'mediates difference, conflict and the plurality of modes of being into an abstract resolution which would be the identity of power'. Human practice, for instance, cannot resolve itself dialectically in transcendent real abstractions. Negri uses Spinoza to attack 'the power of dialectical mediation' to 'subsume[] the individual into the universal'. A countervailing 'emphasis on potential', on the other hand, 'reverses this transcendental metaphysic'. The particular is unassimilable, always one step ahead. Human practice exists for itself. It cannot, by this standard, turn against itself in socially mediated forms of domination.

In the name of Spinoza, Hardt and Negri bring other witnesses. Against Kant and Hegel, they cite Schopenhauer's critique of the 'Romanticism' of German Idealism (2001, pp.81-82). This focuses on two forms of transcendence. On one hand, Kant's transcendental overdetermination of immediacy. Secondly, Hegel's positing of the dialectical resolution in a transcendental state. As concerns the first,

Hardt and Negri follow Schopenhauer in critiquing Kant for a 'liquidat[ion of] the humanist revolution'. It is only in the latter that 'forces that tend to truth and light'- for this, read 'multitude'- 'can prosper'. And, in claiming the impossibility of immediacy, Kant offends against this. The necessity of mediation complicates the untrammelled potentiality and positivity ascribed to the multitude. This opposition to mediation is presented in terms of the nature of political power in *Empire*. In earlier imperialism, social conflicts could be resolved through 'mediatory schema'. But, in *Empire*, conflicting forces 'confront one another directly', without mediation (2001, p.393).

As concerns the second, they adopt Schopenhauer's critique of Hegel's transcendent state. Hegel, the critique goes, wrongly consolidates transcendence into the ontological fact of the state. This suborns and transforms 'the immanent goal of the multitude' into something else. But the state in *Empire* is as a result of the multitude. What the transcendence of the state extinguishes is that which 'strives, desires or loves'. This prohibits the grasp of the 'potentiality' present on the 'revolutionary plane of immanence'. Only 'the refusal of transcendence' makes possible 'thinking this immanent power' (2001, pp.91-92).

What this all rests on, ultimately, is a rejection of dialectics, and, relatedly, totality. This, as Noys notes, is not specific to Negri's 'neo-Spinozism'. It is, rather, uniform across the various 'affirmationist' theories of contemporary capitalism. Noys attributes this to 'a continuing fear of the supposed totalizing effects of dialectical thought' (2012, p.ix). The unmediated 'singularity' of *Empire* and multitude (2001, p.73) might superficially sound akin to a totality of relations. But it describes something very different. It rejects entirely the approaches to totality found in critical theory. Adorno stressed the transcendental domination of totalisation. Lukacs, on the other hand, envisaged the revolutionary recouping of totality. But Negri opposes both (Noys, 2012, p.110). From his perspective, each posits the mediation of parts into a transcendently dominating or liberating whole. Under the logic of immanence, there are no 'parts' to mediate in such a 'totality'. There is *only one thing*, constituent power, without counterparts.

Kant's schema, Hegel's state- both dialectically resolve principles and relations into a totalising concept. Both Negri rejects, in the name of an attack on dialectics. This rejection comes early in Negri's work, albeit in different forms. In his lectures on the *Grundrisse*, Negri suggests that antagonism in capitalist society no longer forms 'part of the dialectic', but rather negates it (1992, p.188). There is still a negative moment present in Negri's thought at this point. But Negri's adoption of a Spinozist discourse dispenses with all antagonism and negation. With them disappears any sense that the dialectic is there to be negated at all. The 'negation', indeed, is too dialectical itself to survive Negri's Spinozist turn to immanence.

The dismissal of transcendence, mediation and dialectics unite in Negri's method of analysis. '[M]ethod', Negri writes, 'is not a dialectical to-and-fro, and does not need to bring transcendence into method in order to illustrate the transformations of reality' (2008, p.176). This posits changes in the immediate form of labour as the basis for changes in capitalism as a whole. But capitalism as a whole is a system of social mediations. Immediate productive activity is significant in capitalist society only in its socially mediated forms. An outright refusal to entertain transcendence and mediation preclude its conceptualisation. And a methodological aversion to dialectics compounds this.

Dialectics describes the process of thinking. It entails a movement from abstract to concrete and back again. But for Negri this diverges from immanence. Things are as they are- no essence lurks within appearance. Social constitution is not revealed by study, but is all there is to begin with. The 'sociological, factual and to-the-point

analysis of the transformations taking place in labour' hinges on this (2008, p.22). A dialectic of 'inside and outside' does not capture, for them, the 'play of degrees and intensities, of hybridity and artificiality' the multitude engages in, spontaneously and autonomously, with immaterial labour (2001, pp.187-88). This is because this activity is world-constituting, and in an uncomplicated way. As human practice, immaterial labour is not mediated in alien, abstract modes of domination. It is what it is. And the world in which it takes place is inseparable from the activity itself. The case study in the latter part of the thesis suggests that an understanding of contemporary labour is incomplete without a grasp of the mediatory schemes to which it is subject.

Without dialectics, the immediate form of labour is all we need to know to understand its significance for capitalist society as a whole. This forces focus upon immediate changes in productive activity as harbingers of paradigmatic shifts. As I suggest in Chapter 5, this emphasizes novelty of content at the expense of continuity of form. And, as I will go on to suggest, it induces a kind of candied optimism. It is an affirmation of the present with unfortunate political and theoretical consequences today.

Having set out the motivations behind and implications of Negri's immanentist turn, I will now give a critique. As we have seen, Negri holds to a monist ontology inherited from Spinoza. The world is one thing, and just as it seems. The multitude's constituent power creates it, without complication. The development of society- which is, after all, capitalist society and no other- is one and the same as the development of the multitude. And this puts a positive spin on that development. It represents nothing other than a radical version of the liberal narrative of endless progress. Every change in the workplace, every cross-border flow of capital, is a small victory in the name of human liberation. In this section, I will unpick the theoretical leaps through which things appear this way. I do so in the name of a critique of political economy that, by means of negative dialectics, suspects the forms of social mediation through which capitalist society reproduces itself. This centres on abstract categories: value, money for instance. But, crucially, it opens out upon concrete social relations of antagonism, domination and coercion. I contend that Negri, in the development of his work towards a Spinozist immanence, discards the resources necessary for this critique. When all things are one thing, the negative moment, the destructive character, of events exits stage left.

4.7. Constituent power and perversion

For Hardt and Negri, there is a single positive social principle: constituent power. They demonstrate this by using a functionalist metaphor from Spinoza. If we 'cut the tyrannical head off the social body', they write, 'we will be left with the deformed corpse of society' (2001, p.204). This is not presented as a contradictory state of affairs. It passes no comment on the paradox whereby we depend on the same social rule that dominates us to live. Our bond with society is arbitrated by money. What generates it, regenerates us. But it casts no suspicion on this situation, wherein our subsistence and survival rests on an alien, antagonistic power's reproduction.

Rather, the statement permits of no contradiction. It dismisses conflict within the form of the functionalist, metaphorically organic 'social body'. The head and the body cannot be parsed. The 'head', in so far as they recognise one, can only blindly follow where the body leads. Although phrased in a Spinozist idiom, this relates to Negri's operaist roots. As Cleaver suggests, operaismo has capital ruling always in response to the autonomous activity of the working class. In this sense, 'then capital cannot be understood as an outside force independent of the working class' (2000, p.66).

With Hardt, Negri recodes Tronti's Copernican Inversion through the Spinozist idea of constituent power. Constituted power- capital/Empire- always follows where constituent power- working-class/multitude- leads. For Negri, this serves the purpose of endowing the working-class or multitude with a revolutionary power. In a thoroughgoing critique, Bonefeld suggests Negri's pre-Hardt appropriation of the Inversion achieves precisely the opposite. For Bonefeld, Negri conceives capital as a form of power that wields only a reactive potential. The multitude, meanwhile, enacts autonomous creative urges capital satiates. But this conceptualisation elides capital's status as an antagonistic social relation between people. And, in so doing, it, contrary to Negri's intention, 'destroys the insight that labour is a constitutive power' (1994, pp.44-5). In such an account, Bonefeld writes, capital (or Empire) 'lives' by cajoling labour's self-activity into serving the capitalist cause'. The very fact that there is a reaction undermines the constituting capacity ascribed to labour, or multitude. So, at the most basic level, on the theory's own terms, the inversion it posits is negated by its central means of explaining how capitalism works.

Bonefeld largely refers to Negri's appropriation of the Copernican Inversion in his early-nineties work. But these issues intensify as the Inversion gains a Spinozist stress in Negri's work with Hardt. As Noys notes, Hardt and Negri 'appear' to posit a 'dualism' between constituent and constituted power in the *Empire* trilogy. Here, one is led to assume, struggle occurs, as set out in the Inversion. But, ultimately, things resolve themselves along the lines Noys cites Deleuze ascribing to Bergson. Dualism, this says, is 'only a moment, which must lead to the reformation of a monism' (2012, p.111). There is, really, only one power- constituent power- around which no negative moment of social conflict can cohere. Empire is one and the same thing as constituent power. It is a world it creates, autonomously, in its image (2012, p.112). The only negativity here is that which faces constituent power in its inability to 'realise [its] own power'. These are the immanent limits of capital or Empire. But even these spring from the entirely positive development of the multitude's capacities. The limits are built only to be broken down.

The relationship between constituent and constituted in Negri's work forms a paradoxically monist dualism. An identity is posited between one and the other. But the identity posited does not capture the contradiction between individuals and capitalist society. We live and produce through human practice the results of which come to dominate us. The creations of human practice appear to us as commodities carrying value expressed in money. And it is through these commodities that we subsist. We have a hard, material dependency on economic abstractions alien to us and our desires and interests. Similarly, as we see in the case study, the desire to be creative possessed by graphic designers can be fulfilled in commodity society only through waged commercial work, contrary to the repressed artistic sensibility that the value relation they generate depends on all the same, even while denying and stifling it. There is no simple identity between capitalist power and human practice. It is a broken mirror, full of contradiction. One thrives upon the other, but not through pure reflection. Rather, they relate through the perversion of one by the other.

We produce and live by means of things and relations that exist against us as alien, dominating forces all the same. Bonefeld's critique puts this in the strongest terms possible. Bonefeld permits that human practice has a 'constitutive power'. But, to extent it has it, it exists- 'as itself'- contradictorily, 'in the mode of being denied' (1994, pp.50-51). It does not exist for itself in the way Negri suggests. Shorn of a dialectic, Negri has no route through which to see that things are not always as they seem. That things can exist as themselves and something else cannot be grasped through immanence. But the positing of a world free of contradiction invites the ascription of a for-itself positivity to all human activity. In the conclusion, I reflect on how, here,

postoperaist accounts of the changing world of work, by imbuing contemporary labour with a liberatory positivity, chime with mainstream bourgeois accounts of work in the creative industries- an account the evidence presented in Chapters 8-10 confounds.

On this, Negri ignores the true contradiction of how human practice wields a constitutive force in the world of capital. Bonefeld characterises this oversight as follows. In every society humans produce. But the specificity of human productive activity in capitalist society consists in the forms its results assume. Centrally, they take an alien, mystical existence above and beyond the capacity of human producers to control them. As commodities, these products in turn transform human production itself. It becomes a relationship not between humans but between things, and between objective economic forms. The value-form 'asserts itself over social relations as mere thinghood' (Bonefeld, 1994, p.50). In short, what human productive activity 'constitutes' comes to assume the "perverted" form of value' (1994, p.45). The alienation labour undergoes in this regard turns it 'against itself', even while it is every bit as much itself as before (1994, p.46). Human subjectivity realises itself in objective forms stacked against it, but through which it cannot but live. Only a dialectical method attuned to the movement between subject and object gets at the negativity of the human under capitalism. Negri, meanwhile, posits only positivity.

4.8. Human practice and productivism

As Ryan points out, for Negri, Spinoza only 'justifies his own political and philosophical position' (1992b, pp.216-8). Spinoza only adds light to a conceptual apparatus already out from under the shadow of the critique of political economy. Negri had broken with an understanding of labour as an abstract mediation of human practice proceeding through transcendental forms. What Spinoza gives Negri is an 'emphasis on human production as potential'. And, politically, this 'opposes the subsumption of that activity into a principle of transcendence, of power'. This 'production' is synonymous with 'collective human activity as world-constituting practice'. For Hardt and Negri (2001, p.73), bourgeois humanist philosophy's discovery of immanence 'brought down to earth' the 'powers of creation that had previously been consigned exclusively to the heavens'.

But, I would contend that this fails to capture how human practice under capitalism attains socially mediated forms. Commodity, value, money, capital: these are transcendental, in that they are alien and above and beyond our capacity to control. But what the critique of political economy as a critical theory of society suggests is that they spring from the very 'world-constituting practice' Hardt and Negri eulogise. Creative activity in capitalist society is mediated as labour as a matter of necessity. We cannot live without selling our capacity to perform it. And we cannot live except through buying the commodities labour produces. In this, the things that dominate us are themselves the perverted results of our creative activity. And this contradictory reality is what the immanent perspective elides. It brings powers of creation too far down to earth. In so doing, it fails to look heavenwards to see how those powers of creation manifest in forms of transcendental capitalist power. Analogously, the creative activity enacted in the case study agencies featured in later chapters turns out not to be self-sufficient unto itself, but inseparable from its situation in market relations at either end of the process of production.

This is a wider problem relating to the rejection of mediation. Only the most immediate guise of any given activity is taken as theoretically or empirically relevant. But the method used in this thesis, set out in Chapter 3 and employed in the case study in Chapters 8, 9 and 10, does not delude itself with the superficial content of creative labour itself. Creative, cognitive, communicative it may be, but the research here views it within its full social significance within the circuit of capital as a whole, by

reading it through the relations of commodity exchange in which it intervenes, as detailed in Chapter 7.

In Negri's account, however, the forms through which that activity attains significance in capitalist society are ignored. To Bonefeld, Negri sees human practice as existing only for itself. Placing a positive spin on the Copernican Inversion, Negri casts capital as the suitor of the working class. The former constantly struggles to 'cajole [the latter] to its ends' (Bonefeld, 1994, p.46). In all this, the autonomous creativity of the multitude leads. Capitalist development expresses its revolutionary subjectivity. And, thus, Negri inaugurates a tendency to eulogise changes in capitalism that we see bear fruit today. Postcapitalist dreaming provides a radical alibi for mainstream scheming around the same themes. New kinds of work, technological shifts, productive paradigms: the multitude propels the world forward.

That productive activity can be seen as self-sufficient chimes with a pervading productivism in Negri's work. Despite disavowing traditionalist productivist Marxism, in both operaismo and postoperaismo a contrary pull remains. Focus falls on struggles in and against labour. The relationship with work is seen as historically decisive. The labour theory of value is held to be in crisis only on the most reductive reading (see Chapters 5 and 6). In all this, it follows the Marxist imperative to exalt labour as a matter of political expediency. Workers are endowed with great power to create the world's wealth and change its course. And from this flows a logical and historical pre-eminence in theory. In this, Spinozism affords Negri a philosophical alibi and ally. It 'affirm[s] the productive force of humankind' (Ryan, 1992b, p.218). This provides a route through which Hardt and Negri recruit Marx to their cause. They claim, along the most orthodox of lines, that Marx sees everything beginning with production (2004, p.143).

But the question for Marx does not begin with production, but why and how its results take the form they do in capitalist society. As we will see in the case study, production in and of itself tells us less about the role of labour in capitalist society than do the wider social relations in which it is embedded, at both ends of the process. This is why, one might contend, he begins *Capital* with wealth, money and commodities, and not labour. Hardt and Negri shirk the difficult questions Marx was actually interested in asking. Why does productive activity in capitalism result in certain historically specific social forms? Exalting the productive activity itself, Hardt and Negri display no curiosity in the latter. This, plausibly, is because it renders untenable the positive embrace of the possibilities of the present. The constitutive power of human labour does not exist for itself in a positive sense. What the critique of political economy as a critical theory of society shows is that it is imbricated otherwise. It exists through and for a society where its products rule over it negatively. As I demonstrate in the Chapter 5, Hardt and Negri's narrow productivism helps them look upon the present from the rosy prospectus of novelty and change.

4.9. Abstraction, mediation and dialectics

The one-sided perspective on production is supported by the elision of the forms of social mediation through which production gains significance in capitalist society. And this in turn relates to how Hardt and Negri dismiss abstraction and mediation in their philosophical outlook. As we have seen, they distance themselves from Kant on the basis that his philosophy rests in transcendence rather than immediacy (2001, pp.81-82). They prioritise concrete immediacy over anything abstract, mediated or transcendent. Things exist for themselves, and are not overdetermined or dominated by anything else. This, as we have seen, impacts upon how antagonism is- or rather, is not- conceptualised. The dualism they posit resolves into a monism. Constituted power is subservient to constituent.

But, as Bonefeld asserts, this ascribes a false subjectivity and intentionality to both. Characterising their relationship as immanent, it elides how capital really relates to its subjects. Which is to say, as a perverted social form assumed by the results of human production, turned against those producers. What is concrete is abstracted from, and what is immediate is mediated. And the specific forms assumed by this abstraction, this mediation, characterise capitalism. To understand this, it is necessary to leave sufficient analytical room for abstraction and mediation. Hardt and Negri, however, rule it out from the start. Bonefeld aptly captures the contradictions central to this conundrum when he writes that

The emphasis on 'inversion' does not raise the issue that 'labour' is the producer of perverted forms. Instead, labour tends to be seen as a power which exists external to its own perverted social world: the constitutive power of labour stands external to its own perversion. This perversion is called 'capital'. Labour is seen as a self-determining power at the same time as which capital is a perverted power by virtue of its 'cajoling capacity'. Thus Negri's emphasis on capital as a 'bewitching power'. The emphasis on the struggle component of the relation between structure and struggle cannot overcome their theoretical separation. The question why does human practice exist in the perverted form of capitalist domination is not raised. (1994, pp.44-5)

The big issue here, suggests Bonefeld, is Negri's 'romantic invocation' of pure immediacy. Negri's romanticism on this point differs from that he and Hardt critique the German Idealists for. In the latter, we are led to believe, the stance on mediation is overly romantic. But in return, Hardt and Negri champion immediacy not only theoretically but politically. Immediate changes in labour are celebrated as the basis for incipient liberation. The immediate activity of the multitude revolutionises life under capital with each leap. This optimism is the obverse of the theoretical attachment to immediacy. Exciting changes outweigh boring continuities. And this owes overwhelmingly to Negri's theoretical blindness around forms of social mediation. The rule of value continues, in spite of any change in the immediate phenomena it mediates. By probing the wider web of relations that sit behind this immediacy, and those into which immediacy is mediated, the case study accomplishes a critique of the claims of change Negri fixates upon.

In this, the prism of pure immediacy inadequately captures the *social form* 'in and through which the constitutive power of labour subsists in a contradictory way' (1994, pp.44-5). For Hardt and Negri, the inception of immaterial labour centres on the multitude's powers of constitution. The communicative and affective labour they perform is spontaneously and autonomously cooperative. Its networks model the future in the shell of the present. And, moreover, they produce an excess beyond the capacity of capital to valorise.

Hardt and Negri see the multitude's immanent productivity posing a crisis for value. This is because they see value as a question of quantification rather than a social form of mediation, as we saw was the case in Chapters 1 and 2 and will interrogate further in Chapter 6. And they see the multitude working towards its liberation only by eliding the domination wrought by this form. This owes to their immanentist attack on mediation. And it owes also to the absence of any dialectics capable of comprehending contradiction. Both relate to the rejection of abstraction and transcendence. The latter conceptually unlock how the things we produce take on a social form that rules over us as an alien, impersonal power. No matter how the content of the labour by which this occurs changes, the commodity form remains. Thus we have a kind of productivism. Only immediate changes in labour matter, and not the forms in which they are objectified.

The immanentist philosophical attack on dialectics is the handmaiden of this productivism. Aufheben (2007) relate this to how Hardt and Negri suspend the subject-object dialectic. For the latter, subjects realise themselves without the necessity of objectification. Their Schopenhauerian view of 'history as pure will and subjectivity' casts labour as squarely 'for-itself'. It need bear no reference to objectivity to be realised. But the critique of political economy as a critical theory of society says otherwise. In capitalism, objectification proceeds by necessity through commodification. We must sell our labour power to eat, and acquire its results to live. The world of capital springs from us but becomes indispensable and dominating. Collapsing the subject-object dialectic forecloses a perspective on this. And it induces untoward positivity about the prospects for autonomous human creativity. The objectifications that rule over subjects under capital spring from and suppress human creativity, as the example of work in the creative industries shows.

4.10. Conclusion

Turchetto (2003) criticises Hardt and Negri for being *too* dialectical. But I would claim, following Holloway (2002a), that Negri, with and without Hardt, is nowhere near dialectical enough. Negri dismisses dialectics only by associating it with synthesis and order. But the dialectics employed in the critique of political economy as a critical theory of society radically differs. It centres on negation, and posits no resolution. Negri misunderstands dialectics as reproducing a kind of stasis. Against this he poses the immanent revolutionary movement of the multitude's singularity. But *negative* dialectics is about sublation and denial via objectification in social forms. No synthesis is posited. It is confrontational, antagonistic. The 'positivisation' of struggle in Negri's theory achieves precisely the opposite, Holloway contends. It blunts the force of negativity, of non-identity and anti-identity. And these, Holloway suggests, are by necessity antagonisms around which struggle must by definition- and *against* definition- circulate (2002a). As Holloway writes, '[i]n a world that dehumanises us, the only way in which we can exist as humans is negatively, by struggling against our dehumanisation' (2002a). It is negative, or it is nothing.

Negri's allergy to the dialectic stems from its understanding as a synthetic search for order. In Negri's terms, it lacks the 'destructive character' Benjamin holds to be its core (1999, quoted in Noys, 2012). This destructive character, indeed, is largely alien to Negri's wider worldview. His immanentist complicity with the world as it is suggests no attempt to think outside it in the way a negative dialectics makes possible. This lack of negativity only serves to induce unwarranted optimism as to propitious conditions of crisis novel conditions of contemporary work precipitate. Negative dialectics looks to that which is denied and sublated in the present. It extracts the non-identity, the excess of that which is denied and sublated, and poses it against the present. But Hardt and Negri, cast capitalist society as one thing without possibility of it being any other. There is nothing else to extract and build a politics of upheaval around.

Without this negative orientation, Hardt and Negri underestimate the challenge faced in establishing non-capitalist social relations. They take for granted the establishment of liberation by means of relations that already exist. The hand of labour is overstated against capital, as change is celebrated and continuities ignored. Capitalism's end or overthrow appears not only immanent but imminent. As Aufheben assert (2007, pp.30-31), 'being non-dialectical would not be too bad in itself', were it not for the theoretical and political problems produced. In the next chapters, we delve more fully into these problems and their implications for the case study at hand.

5. BEYOND THE FRAGMENT: ON THE FRAGMENT ON MACHINES

5.1. Introduction

Like others through time, our political moment may well rest on the inheritance of a few slender pages from the oeuvre of Marx.¹⁹ The 'Fragment on Machines' (1993, pp.704-706) is a small section of his *Grundrisse*, the notebooks for what would later become *Capital* (1976). In it, Marx presents a future scenario where the use of machines and knowledge in production expands. Production revolves more around knowledge than physical effort. Machines liberate humans from labour, and the role of direct labour time in life shrinks to a minimum. Free time proliferates. The divorce of labour-time from exchange value sparks capitalist crisis. But this technological leap brings about the possibility of a social development on a massive scale. Freed from physical subordination to the means of production, workers grow intellectually and cooperatively. This freely-generated 'general intellect' reinserts itself, uncoerced, into production as fixed capital. The worker is incorporated only at a distance, rather than as a constituent part of the capital relation. The potential for an incipient communism arises.

If this scenario sounds familiar now, it likely is- albeit not by means of its conditions being brought any closer to reality. Rather, a new generation of Fragment-thinkers are steadily evangelising its message through the media and policy circuit. In so doing, they pick up the thread of work commenced by postoperaists like Antonio Negri two decades ago.

In the eighties and nineties, the Fragment inspired postoperaist analyses of the New Economy and 'immaterial labour'. Popularised by Hardt and Negri's bestseller *Empire* (2001), it wielded influence on early-noughties alterglobalisation struggles. Its echoes carried through, post-crisis, to Occupy and its intellectuals. And, as the left moved towards a state-oriented politics of populism and electoralism in the mid-2010s, it reached a peak. Postcapitalism (Mason, 2015b), accelerationism (Mackay and Avanessian, 2015, Srnicek and Williams, 2015a, see also Negri's response (2015)), Fully Automated Luxury Communism (Bastani 2015): all owe their roots to the Fragment. In their name, the Fragment has gained a foothold in the popular consciousness. Media personalities accrue it broadsheet inches, directly (see for instance Mason, 2015a) or by inference (Harris, 2016, Jones, 2016).

The most unexpected turn has been its uptake in the parliamentary political world. Under Corbyn, Labour's shadow treasury team has embraced an economic agenda of 'Socialism with an iPad' (Wintour, 2015) and the basic income (Stewart, 2016). Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell routinely invites leading postcapitalists and accelerationists to address policy workshops.²⁰ The intellectuals disseminating Fragment-thought number among the embattled Corbyn's leading supporters (see Mason 2016). This cross-fertilisation with the calculation of party policy marks high-water for the Fragment's reception. It has wended a strange and unconventional route to prominence in which Marx is often a silent partner. It is one part of this route, in the work of Negri and the postoperaists, I seek to chart here.

To the Italian operaist milieu, the Fragment's interpretation, Thoburn (2003, p.80) writes, has been 'akin to biblical exegesis'. This interpretation rests less on 'reification of authorial truth' than its 'iteration' in 'different sociohistorical contexts as part of the composition of varying political forms'. Its early apogee was Negri's 1978 Paris

¹⁹ This chapter has been published in slightly different form as a working paper (Pitts, 2016b)

²⁰ For instance, the Labour Party's 'New Economy' Shadow Chancellor's Conference, held at Imperial College, London on the 22nd May 2016

lectures on the *Grundrisse*, published as *Marx Beyond Marx* (1992). A political weapon from the start, it was not until *Empire* (2001) that its lasting sociohistorical iteration was set out. The New Economy drew Negri to conclude that the conditions described in the Fragment were already present.

In this way, postoperaist receptions of the Fragment seize upon contemporary transformations in work (Noys 2012, pp.113-114). The positing of an already-existing crisis of measurability rests upon the advent of 'immaterial labour' (Lazzarato 1996). This puts to work elements formerly, we are told, extraneous to the production process. Cognitive, affective and cooperative capacities and free time factor in value production. What the Fragment foretells becomes reality.

Hardt and Negri define immaterial labour as transcending 'the expropriation of value measured by individual or collective labor time'. This, of course, rests on an understanding whereby value was measured thus previously- which was never the case to begin with (see Chapter 6). Regardless, they inform us that, today, labour is no longer subject to capitalist control. It is a self-organized function of the 'multitude'. For Hardt and Negri, the multitude is what happens when the proletariat and the labour movement alters radically from its paradigmatic figure of the white, male manual worker to a multifarious, mobile body of so-called singularities (2001, p.53). The multitude's immeasurable productivity is enacted through communicative and affective networks. In this way, labour holds the potential of 'valorizing itself' through its own activity. '[H]uman faculties, competences and knowledge' are 'directly productive of value', rather than requiring the superintendence of capital (2009, pp.132-133). This, Virno notes (1996, pp.22-3), is the current form assumed by what Marx referred to in the *Fragment* as 'general intellect'.

Its autonomous activities, Lazzarato writes, are located in the 'immaterial basin' of 'society at large'. This labour, then, is 'not obviously apparent to the eye', undefined by the four walls of a factory. It thus 'becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish leisure time from work time. In a sense, life becomes inseparable from work' (1996, pp.137-8). And, postoperaists suggest, this potentiates the crisis of value *qua* labour-time described in the Fragment. This is synonymous with the 'crisis of measurability' contested in this thesis.

In this chapter, I confront the postoperaist positing of the existing realisation of the Fragment. As we will see further in the next chapter, postoperaists elide the persistence of the real abstraction of value and the social relations of production it expresses and proceeds through. I challenge the assertion that the crisis and redundancy of value associated with the Fragment is realised. This is because we still, in a contradictory way turned against us, subsist through the value-form. Where postoperaists see a 'communism of capital' already existing, I contend that we live, work, starve and suffer still under its rule. An alternative strand of Marxist theorising- that of the New Reading of Marx and Open Marxism- brings its full horror home. But as we saw in Chapter 3, and with reference specifically to postoperaismo, Chapter 4, recognition of this negativity is necessary to develop the theoretical and practical tools to overcome it.

Read against the radically revisionist Marx exegetically defined by the NRM, there are two problems with the postoperaist account of the Fragment. The first relates to Marx himself. As Heinrich (2013b) asserts, the Fragment's temporary formulation fails against the standards of Marx's own work as set out in Chapter 1. Its fragmentary status owes to this. The Fragment was one part of Marx's working discarded as his theory developed in sophistication and coherence. The most complete statement of this theory is that we find in the still-unfinished iteration given in *Capital*.

Postoperaists have us believe value relates not to abstract social forms, but quantities of inputs and outputs. In this, their work bears out a disavowed productivist temptation towards the factory. In a recent critique, Moishe Postone (2012) assays Hardt's suggestion that 'the question of measurability is a function of the nature of that which is measured— material or immaterial'. Rather, 'the question of measurability is, basically, one of commensurability'. This relates not to specific objects or practices, but 'the social context within which they exist'. The grounds for 'mutual exchangeability' are 'historically specific and social'. For instance, how two distinct items are rendered commensurable will change through time. Today, this is value, what Postone calls 'a historically specific form of social mediation'. This 'crystallisation' occurs in spite of any change in the material or immaterial basis of that which it mediates. We will explore this further in the next chapter.

Recognition of this socially mediated form destabilises the Fragment-interpretations hegemonic within new strands of popular Marxism. It shows that the situation set out in the Fragment is contrary to the development of Marx's own theory. And his interpreters since do not do any better, the law of value they claim redundant rendered resistant to its purported 'crisis'.

Postoperaist claims as to the realisation of the Fragment's conditions in the present are possible not only by virtue of a misunderstanding of the value-form. They also elide the persistence of the social relations it conceals and implies.

As we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, the NRM radically diverges from the Marx one finds represented in receptions of the Fragment on Machines. In the Fragment, Marx describes how the increase in machinery in the labour-process displaces human labour. This weakens the role of labour-time as the measure of human productive activity. The quantitative connection between labour-time and exchange value breaks down. For postoperaists, this 'crisis of measurability' or 'crisis of the law of value' afflicts capitalism today.

The critique of political economy, therefore, is, as Bonefeld (2014) puts it, fully a critical theory of society as a whole. It refuses to accept at face value the objective forms taken by congealed social relations in capitalist society. It does not reflect the world back at itself with the same objectified economic and social forms that dominate us. The case study in the second part of this thesis shows the real potential for such an approach to get to grips with the true state of labour and value in contemporary capitalism, where postoperaismo cannot.

In what follows, I suggest that postoperaist receptions of the Fragment do precisely that. And this complicity with the present state of things may account for the Fragment's popularity with policymakers and media movers-and-shakers today. In the subsequent discussion, I return to the roots of this popularity to destabilise them. In so doing, I hope to contribute to the unfolding debate over the possibilities of a post-work, postcapitalist utopia in the present day.

5.2. The Communism of Capital

The modern tribunes of postcapitalism derive their wayward theorising from the postoperaist proliferation of Marx's Fragment. But I suggest that readings of Marx that sit the Fragment front-and-centre are misplaced. They extrapolate from it a situation impossible in the present according to the letter of his value theory. As we have seen, Heinrich (2013b) recommends we treat it as exactly what it is: a fragment. The scenario it presents remains untouched as Marx develops his theory of value towards *Capital*, which, as we have seen in Chapter 1, and will explore further in Chapter 6, rests on much different assumptions about what value is and how it comes about.

Tony Smith (2013) suggests another basis on which to situate the Fragment within Marx's wider body of work. Smith suggests that the Fragment describes a *future* communism, not a current capitalism. This would explain how radically the prospectus breaks with what we know of Marx's theory of value as a theory of social form.

Problematically, modern popularisations of the Fragment run counter to this periodisation. As Caffentzis notes, what Marx posits at some point in the future, Negri sees holding in the here and now (2005, p.89). This was not always the case. In *Marx Beyond Marx*, for instance, Negri suggests that communism is defined in the transition towards it (1992, p.115), with no implication this transition is complete. It is underway, perhaps, but in no meaningful sense realised. Here, Negri suggests that only communism's realisation fulfils the conditions the Fragment describes. It brings an end to the law of value, through 'the negation of all measure, the affirmation of the most exasperated plurality- creativity' (1992, p.33). But, at this stage, Negri makes no intimation that this point has been reached.

But, by *Empire*, this 'exasperated plurality' reappears as the basis for a shift in stress from Marx to Spinoza. Drawing on the latter, Negri conceives creative desire immanently driving capitalist development towards Fragment-conditions. Empirical changes in the world of work express what we can call, following Beverungen, Murtola and Schwartz (2013), a 'communism of capital'. Immaterial labour- creative, communicative, cognitive- 'seems to provide the potential for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism' (2001, p.294).

Earlier, in his *Grundrisse* lectures, Negri describes the Fragment as 'the highest example of the use of an antagonistic and constituting dialectic' in Marx's work (1992, p.139). But in the switch to Spinoza, the antagonism and the dialectic disappear. Only constitution remains. The difference relates to how Negri periodises historical transition. In *Marx Beyond Marx*, he characterizes the Fragment as prophesizing a 'communism' reached through the constituting power of working-class subjectivity. '*Communism has the form of subjectivity*,' he writes, '*communism is a constituting praxis*'. This is a movement in opposition to the present: 'There is no part of capital that is not destroyed by the impetuous development of the new subject.' (1992, p.163). But, by *Empire*, the struggle seeps away. The new subjectivity- that of the multitude- is in compliance, not conflict, with the present. This is because, by virtue of its immanent creative power, the present is in its own image. As such, the communism foretold in the Fragment is no longer subject to a struggle through which to attain it. It is, rather, a current with which one conforms. As we considered at the end of the last chapter, this shows how close postoperaismo remains to the productivist, teleological Marxist orthodoxy with which it auspiciously claims to break. In the next section I show how, despite appearing as a countervailing intellectual trend to traditional Marxism, it ends up repeating many of its mistakes.

5.3. Moving with the current

That postoperaismo insufficiently breaks with the conventional Marxism it claims to relates to the position of workers and class struggle in its theoretical worldview. In delineating a 'communism of capital', Negri pays lip service to the worker-led struggle of Tronti's Copernican reversal (Cleaver, 1992a) that sits at the very inception of the operaist tradition. But the account of change and crisis in *Empire* ultimately writes history without it. Multitude and Empire move in syncopation- and, vice versa. Whatever happens in the world is a result of the unfolding of the multitude's 'creativity of desire' (Hardt and Negri, 2001, pp.51-52) conceptually derived from Spinoza.

Here the 'affirmationism' that Noys (2012) skewers is clear. It illuminates the contemporary resonances of Negri's interpretation of the Fragment's present-day

realisation. Take the 'accelerationist' current, with which Negri himself engages (2015, see also Mackay and Avanessian, 2015, Srnicek and Williams, 2015). Here Fragment-thinking endows a nihilist optimism whereby whatever happens, however bad, is for the good. What accelerates subsumption and crisis (of measurability and otherwise) represents a liberation. Srnicek and Williams (2015b), for instance, herald a time where newscasters report firm closures and job losses not as tragedies, but victories. When the immanent driving force of multitude stands behind every twist and turn in capitalist misery, it is easy to see a silver lining to the fraying thread that links life ever less with labour. A crisis in social reproduction is misread as post-work possibility (Dinerstein, Taylor, Pitts, 2016). How one sees this situation produces quite different politics. One emphasises human questions of how we access the things we need to live. The other places faith in robots and machines to liberate us from what we need to do to get them instead.

This myopia around work and production unwittingly reproduces the stale communism and social democracy operaismo originally sought to escape. On one hand, there is teleology. The orthodoxy stood sure in the knowledge that history unfolds precisely to plan: an inevitable collapse of capitalism propelled by outdated irrationality and technological change. Workers were expected to move with the current, rather than against it. But, as Benjamin wrote of the social democracy of his time in Thesis XI of his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1999), its conformism to what is 'attaches not only to its political tactics but to its economic views as well [...]'. Nothing has corrupted the German working class so much as the notion that it was moving with the current. It regarded technological developments as the fall of the stream with which it thought it was moving' (Benjamin, quoted in Noys, 2012, p.115).

As Noys suggests, a 'key symptom' of this conformism was the celebration of labour (2012, p.115). This reappears again, today, in the affirmationist Fragment-thinking of postoperaists like Negri. It betrays a reverse productivism, whereby all change in capitalist hangs on the workplace. Only here, its end is posited as opposed to its liberation. Today's postoperaist-inspired radicals hold post-work to be synonymous with postcapitalism. A kind of work, with a kind of worker, is taken to portend a new world. In this case, it is the 'immaterial labourer'. This displays a traditionalist productivism inherited, as Caffentzis astutely notes, from Marxist-Leninism. Here, 'the revolutionary subject in any era is synthesised from the most "productive" elements of the class' (2013, p.79).

But, in postoperaismo, this is augmented by a 'Spinozist metaphysic' that 'affirms the productive force of humankind', as Ryan puts it (1992b, p.218). Everyone is the most productive element of the class, which is now 'multitude'. Spinozist monism, which suggests everything is as one, grants Negri is convenient alibi. Unremitting positivity greets a world wherein whatever happens results from multitudinous 'creativity of desire'. And the hypothesis that this is so is by its nature indisputable. Its only proof is what is. 'History' becomes synonymous with 'multitude', and just as elusive. The political message echoes through bided time: sit back, and let teleology do the rest. Whatever you are doing is good enough. But is it? In the next section, I will evaluate the limitations of the kind of popular action Negri champions, and places at the heart of the supposed changes in labour and capital interrogated later in the case study.

5.4. Too Unlimited

As we touched on in Chapter 4, in eulogising the multitude's capacity to create the world around it, Negri and other postoperaists end up affirming that world. This neutralises their ability to critically get to grips with a world in which human creativity is turned against itself. Noys's concept of 'affirmationism' is important here. In realising the Fragment, for postoperaists like Negri the multitude's actions wield an

'affirmative' dimension (Noys, 2012). Capital is subject to its drives, we are told, which are the immanent motor of all change. This is as true when capitalism is working as when it is not. On one hand, globalisation responds to the border-hopping boundlessness of the nomadic multitude. The New Economy arises from the autonomous and cooperative creativity of that multitude. On the other hand, crisis springs from the multitude's challenge to capital's limits. As Noys notes, the crisis of measurability springs from an excess of life made 'directly and immeasurably productive' (2012, pp.113-4). So the multitude both compels capitalist development, and its crisis. The positivity of this process is made clear in *Empire*. Hardt and Negri celebrate the immanent force of the multitude, writing that:

Immanence is defined as the absence of every external limit from the trajectories of the action of the multitude, and immanence is tied only, in its affirmations and destructions, to regimes of possibility that constitute its formation and development [...]. If Empire is always an absolute positivity, the realization of a government of the multitude, and an absolutely immanent apparatus, then it is exposed to crisis precisely on the terrain of this definition, and not for any other necessity or transcendence opposed to it. Crisis is the sign of an alternative possibility on the plane of immanence- a crisis that is not necessary but always possible [...]. Since the spatial and temporal dimensions of political action are no longer the limits but the constructive mechanisms of imperial government, the coexistence of the positive and the negative on the terrain of immanence is now configured as an open alternative. Today the same movements and tendencies constitute both the rise and the decline of Empire. (2001, pp.373-374)

The crisis, then, is in no way forced by the *negation* of the unfolding of capitalist social relations. Rather, it confronts capitalism with an *excess* of things already present within it *positively*. These elements are a positive part of its functioning- free time, productivity, value, creativity, desire, labour and non-labour- and of life, which under capital is nothing other than labour-power and its reproduction. In *exceeding* them, the multitude *affirms* (Noys, 2012, pp.113-114) what exceeds limits and the limits themselves. And, by extension, it affirms the relations and things that usually proceed with reasonable bounds of those same limits. Which is to say, value, labour, capital and so on.

One reading might have the multitude affirming what meets the limits, but not the limits themselves. But this chicken-and-egg scenario implies the pre-existence of a constituted power. This suspends the Copernican inversion, springing not from constituent power but something prior. Thus the undialectical core of the idea of constitutive power is exposed.

In a critique of Negri, Bonefeld (1994) restates how the perverted forms taken by the products of human practice dominate and cajole us. In Negri, only the provenance of that which pushes against the limits of valorisation is explained. The origin of those limits themselves is lacking. And it lies in perverted forms of human practice assuming alien power above and beyond us.

A dialectical orientation can grasp this. It comprehends the contradictory unity of, on the one hand, the conceptuality of abstract social form, and, on the other, the non-conceptuality of the struggle to subsist on the other. But Negri's Spinozist immanentism sees only one, uncomplicated monad. It lacks the dialectical sensitivity to contradiction and mediation capable of accessing the nature of the limits it claims the multitude transcends. This relates to an understanding of history and its progression and periodization. In the next section, I will discuss the relevance of Hardt and Negri's distinction between 'molar' and 'molecular' approaches. I argue that, by advocating the latter over the former, Hardt and Negri are able to posit changes impossible in a capitalism that, as shown later in the case study, in many respects remains the same, in spite of alterations in the immediate content of labour.

5.5. Molar and molecular

As I asserted in the previous section, Negri positively associates the multitude with the breaking of capital's quantitative boundaries. But in embracing what challenges its limits, he loses critical focus on the nature of those limits themselves. This disregards how the perverted forms resulting from human practice continue imposing themselves anew. The activities that ebb at the limits of capital are one and the same as those that constitute those limits to begin with. Human practice takes the form of abstract labour in a society mediated by the exchange relation of value. This relates not only to an analysis of social processes at their most abstract. Rather, those processes express the essence contained, denied, within their appearance. Which is to say, concrete social relations, of antagonism, coercion and separation from subsistence outside selling one's labour-power.

Their elision in Negri's account of the Fragment's unfolding is curious. The conceptualisation of the crisis of the law of value is historicist in its presentation. The conditions that make it possible are embedded in a changing set of concrete realities. The crisis of measurability attends changes in the relations of production. And these are, for Negri, synonymous with the forces of production. Workers set the rules under which they labour. The Italian situation in the sixties and seventies is central to this prognosis. A constituent power-grab led to the breakdown of the Keynesian accord on wages and productivity. Operaists watched closely as wage demands rocketed and work refusal proliferated. Workers abandoned agreements submitting their productivity to capitalist command (Cleaver, 2000, p.68). This eventually resulted in a new kind of economy, immaterial and factory-free. For the postoperaists, the revolt of these forces was also a revolution in the relations of production. This is not a dialectical relationship, but one shared by two sides of the Copernican Inversion. Negri's embrace of Spinozist immanence makes this clear. It gives a philosophical basis to render two as one. Where multitude leads, Empire not only follows, but moves in step. But the historical analysis remains more or less the same. The change is rooted in concrete circumstances.

But this historicity leaves postoperaismo no more capable of capturing capitalism's overwhelming continuities. It emphasises only change. This is a deliberate choice. Hardt and Negri set out to distance themselves from a *molar* perspective (Hardt and Negri 2008a, p.50) that explains history along the lines of 'large aggregates or statistical groupings'. This, they claim, results in a world portrayed as one of continuity rather than change, 'a history of purely quantitative differences' (2008a, pp.51-2). On the other hand, a *molecular* perspective is a qualitative approach revealing change rather than continuity. It refers to 'micromultiplicities, or rather singularities, which form unbounded constellations or networks' (2008a, p.51). This is the approach Hardt and Negri choose.

This molecular perspective moors accounts of the Fragment's unfolding in a rejection of continuity. This is so on two counts. On one hand, it elides the persistence of the abstract rule of value. Hence measure itself is done away with. On the other, it elides the continuation of the social relations that undergird it. In other words, it ignores its antagonistic undertow in separation, hunger and dispossession.

The molecular vantage point allies in important ways with Negri's reverse productivism. It permits the extrapolation from compositional changes in labour's content systemic observations about capitalism. But, importantly for the empirical research reported in this thesis, the labour process is merely a carrier of the valorisation process (Arthur, 2013). This implies the persistence of certain social forms and relations. The content of a given labour process matters less than the form

it assumes at the level of capitalist reproduction as a whole. If a molar perspective is necessary to comprehend this, then so be it.

From the molecular perspective, crisis issues from the constituting movement of the multitude. The historically specific conditions under which this occurs owe to this immanent relationship. The multitude's movements are those of capital, too. This is so 'not for any other necessity or transcendence opposed to it' (Hardt and Negri 2001, pp.373-4). Value moves beyond measure because the multitude makes it so.

Understanding value as quantity rather than a social relation, this eschews the 'molar' dimension. Measurability is always in the condition of 'crisis' ascribed to it in Fragment-thought. Capital permanently confronts its inability to fully negate life's concrete specificity in the value-form. For Negri, the challenge posed to measurability is historically specific. The multitude's immeasurable productivity is a novel fact. Its 'immeasurable powers of life' express not an existential vitalism but the contemporary rise to prominence of a 'multitude of singularities' (Noys, 2012, p.112).

But the truth is that there was always an excess, with or without the multitude. There is a remainder of human dignity the value relation cannot contain through denial. This is a critical position Hardt and Negri consciously set out to refute in a missing insert from *Empire* (see Noys, 2012, p.110). Critiques of capitalist totality rally to the defence of principles 'totally Other' to it. But this 'otherness' implies antagonism and contradiction alien to an immanentist viewpoint. This renders out of bounds the positing of a humanity that constantly evades capture.

From Negri's molecular and immanentist perspective, any excess is historically temporary. But, contrary to this periodization, the domination of the particular by totality is permanent. The molecular resonates with pop-intellectual eulogies for a long line of 'new economies'. It celebrates change, at the expense of critiquing capitalist continuities that must be overcome. Politically, this has us hang our hopes on the affirmation and acceleration of historical change, and not its halt-cord. Hence the bad political efficacy of the Fragment and its postoperaist reception on the left today, and its resonance with bourgeois celebrations of the creative industries, on which I reflect in the conclusion.

Reading history molecularly allows Negri to view the present through the prism of the Fragment. The rise of immaterial labour seems to realise the conditions Marx describes. But the ascription of novelty elides how value persists, and the social relations this implies. This extends to the positing of 'paradigm shifts'. As Holloway (2002a) asserts, Hardt and Negri alight upon this idea to explain social change. But parsing one from another- Fordism from post-Fordism, for instance- overlooks how common features carry over.

This parsing is easy when one sees all change issuing from the workplace. As Aufheben note (2007), these paradigms are defined along productivist lines. They pass by in accordance with superficial transformations in the content of labour. This overlooks the stability of the social form productive activities assume. It is this aspect that is crucial for Marx's critique of political economy. Postoperaists focus on only the immediate guise taken by productive activity. But, to see the Fragment within the context of Marx's work, focus must fall on the social form mediating this immediacy. What characterises capitalism is not the specific kind of productive activity that takes place. Rather, it is characterised by the forms taken by its results: value, money, capital. This is the specificity of the social formation in which we find ourselves. Which is to say, capitalism. And understanding this is key to investigating it, as demonstrated later in the thesis.

Bypassing this specificity, postoperaists conceive a capitalism they cannot grasp undergoing a crisis it cannot suffer. The same theoretical imprecision blights the new politics of postcapitalism. Misunderstanding what capitalism is produces misunderstandings over the possibilities of its replacement. And this leads to bad politics. But these foreshortened forms of praxis stem from analytical weaknesses in the first instance, of which I say more in the next chapter.

5.6. Measurement and violence

As I showed in the last section, faulty conceptualizing follows from the molecular succession of paradigm shifts. Its immanentist and productivist analysis of change leads it down many blind alleys. Postoperaist attempts to explain capitalism's reproduction after the unfolding of the Fragment demonstrate this. How does capitalism carry on once its forms of measure enter crisis? To answer this, postoperaists reach for a string of concepts- command, control and violence. They propose a transition from measurement to pure coercion. This suggests that the two are not already implicit within each other. This owes to a misreading of how value and social domination function in the first place.

The progression through command, control and violence mirrors the development of autonomist Marxism. The operaist-postoperaist transition centred on a changing interpretation of class struggle and capitalist development. The first-generation operaists saw a role for capitalist planning of production. This implied measurement, rationalisation, quantification and so on. But this related less to top-down control than capital's reaction to class struggle. Mario Tronti's so-called 'Copernican inversion' was ground-breaking in this regard (Clever, 2000, pp.65-66). It placed workers as the prime mover in capitalist development. But, essentially, capital could still act in response, channelling production to its ends.

With Negri's lectures on the *Grundrisse* came a bold contention to the contrary. An 'empty form of capitalist command' replaced the law of value (Negri, 1992, pp.147-8). The planning and regulation of production gave way to 'a direct relation of force', as Ryan puts it (1992a, p.xxix). The exchange relationship between the buyer and seller of labour power- in production a relationship of exploitation- passes over into a relationship of pure command over which the struggle is no longer economic but 'purely political' (1992a, p.xxix).

Later, Negri substitutes command for control. With Hardt, he follows Deleuze in positing a transition from disciplinary society to one of control. The former saw power enforced within the four walls of the factory, the prison and the school. In the latter, their carceral and exploitative logics seep out of their four walls into society as a whole (Deleuze, 1990, Hardt and Negri, 2001). The conduit for this is the disciplined subjects themselves. Rather than coming from without, at the hands of the capitalist, discipline comes from within. Foucauldian biopolitics meets the Spinozist 'creativity of desire' through which the multitude propels history. The immaterial labourer's self-valorising self-production reappears as a consensual self-exploitation. Under 'command', power is extensified. But in the society of control, it is intensified, through subjectivity itself.

In a recent iteration, Bifo situates violence as measurability's resolution in contemporary capitalism. Capitalist reproduction holds not through planning, command or control, but through brute force alone. Bifo writes:

After Nixon's decision, measurement ended. Standardization ended. The possibility of determining the average amount of time necessary to produce a good ended. Of course, that means that the United States of America, its president, Richard Nixon, decided that violence would take the place of measurement. In conditions of aleatority, what is the condition of the final decision? What is the

action or process of determining value? Strength, force, violence. What is the final way of deciding something- for instance, deciding the exchange rate of the dollar? Violence, of course [...]. There can be no financial economy without violence, because violence has now become the one single method of decision in the absence of the standard.' (Berardi, 2013, p.88)

The problem with each of these novel replacements for measure is they imply measurement is not always already based in relationships of command, control and violence. This owes to the absence of a social-form appreciation of value in postoperaismo. Postoperaists see capitalist measure relating to a quantitative process of valorisation. Hence it enters into crisis when things cannot be counted. But value is a social relation, not a property of things. It appears as a relationship between things. But it contains within this appearance its essence in relationships between people. Postoperaists remain stuck with the objective economic forms of appearance.

Scrutinising the relationships between people clarifies the link between measurement and violence. The question central to the critique of political economy as a critical theory of society is 'why does this content take this form?' (Bonefeld, 2001, p.5). But this is never posed, foreclosing a grasp of how measure and labour relate. The appearance of objective economic forms contains, sublated, that which it denies. Which is to say, historically-grounded concrete social relations. These are the product of an original and sustained violence of brute physicality. They express the radical dispossession whereby whether we eat or starve is arbitrated by the coins in our pocket (see Marx, 1993, 156-7). The socially synthetic (Sohn-Rethel, 1978) function of money and value rests in forceful separation. Continuously, people are deprived of independent individual and collective means to reproduce themselves (see Bonefeld, 2014). The sale of labour-power is last resort. Only by means of this bloody fact do we live in a world of objective economic categories. Measure carries within it this background.

The continuous character of this dispossession institutionalises violence or the threat of it. It is present not only in the continually reproduced material and social preconditions of a world ruled by value. It is also present in the policing of the measures by and through which value manifests. Measurement *is* violence. Postoperaists posit its lapse into crisis and the replacement of one by the other only by wilfully eliding this. As Lukacs writes, the value abstraction 'has the same ontological facticity as a car that runs you over' (quoted in Lotz, 2014, p.xiv). It is this that makes the participant experiences around which Chapters 8-10 are based possible and valuable.

We can see this dimension implied in the etymology of the word 'abstract'. 'Abs' comes from the Latin for 'away', 'tract' '*trahere*', or move. To 'abstract', then, is 'to transport into a formal, calculative space' (Muniesa, Millo and Callon, 2007). Even in the most basic and primitive instances of calculation, this meaning is significant. As David Graeber writes, the 'violence of quantification' (2012, p.14) present in forms of debt 'turns human relations into mathematics'. Violence might 'appear secondary' to measure, money and the abstraction it implies. But, writes Graeber, they have 'a capacity to turn morality into a matter of impersonal arithmetic'. This permits the exertion of force in their pursuit. Graeber uses the example of tribal 'sister exchange'. The forceful removal of things from their context implicated in abstract measurement is clear:

to make a human being an object of exchange, one woman equivalent to another, for example, requires first of all ripping her from her context; that is, tearing her away from that web of relations that makes her the unique conflux of relations that she is, and thus, into a generic value capable of being added and subtracted and

used as a means to measure debt. This requires a certain violence. To make her equivalent to a bar of camwood takes even more violence, and it takes an enormous amount of sustained and systematic violence to rip her so completely from her context that she becomes a slave.' (Graeber, 2012, p.159)

Problematically, Graeber's method is to extrapolate from non-capitalist society insights about a very different social formation. But the link remains. The divergence rests in the fact that, in capitalist society, this violence is sublated in the value-form. But the exchange abstraction still 'liquidates' the concrete, as Adorno and Horkheimer suggest. It is disappeared, as surely as fate was held to dispatch with human subjects pre-Enlightenment (1972, p.13). Measurement not only denies the concrete chaos of reality, transforming quality into quantity. It also denies the concrete social relations that undergird value. The capitalist state enshrines the rule of equivalence in law whilst implicitly threatening violence to enforce it. The sublated principle is negated but retained in the mode of denial. As Kunkel writes of the quantitative obligations of debt (2014, p.116), 'the violence wielded by mafias or the state enforces the abstraction' by which value is ascribed to things, and by which money mediates relationship between individuals. Violence is measurement, and vice versa. It is not, as postoperaists suggest, an alternative to it in the form of command, control or outright force. Once again, change wins out analytically over continuity, to the detriment of critique and praxis. The idea that crisis is around the corner consoles us that change is afoot. If capitalism is seen as in a state of permanent crisis and uncertainty, the easy belief in its coming collapse seems far less tenable.

5.7. Capitalism is crisis

By seeing measurement as a functioning part of capitalism, postoperaists portend its breakdown. But I argue here that its death cannot be announced so brusquely. Postoperaists see capitalism as functioning perfectly until crisis comes. But this ignores the uncertainty capital must constantly confront, in creating, commensurating and circulating commodities, an aspect central to the analysis of creative industries within the circuit of capital given in Chapters 7 and 8. And, I suggest, its persistence in light of this uncertainty indicates, contrary to Negri and his modern followers, that capitalism is far from done.

For postoperaismo, command, control and violence step in only when measurability breaks down. This elides the continuity of measurability's crisis-ridden fragility. Pure quantity can never capture the chaos of reality, and nor does it claim to. Force is always needed to bend reality to its expectations and ease of measurement. This force often issues from the state, and from the law. And force undergirds that which is measured in the first place. Constant struggle marks the condition by which we cannot eat except by the buying and selling of commodities. Violence is meted out in support of it. What the molecular positing of change implies is that all this is novel. But it is not.

The Fragment's scenario of a crisis in the law of value is thinkable only on the basis of a kind of functionalism. Postoperaists perceive breakdown in the functioning of something that, in normal conditions, 'functions' freely and without contradiction. But, where measurement sublates antagonistic social relations of production, contradiction, not function, reigns. Where capitalism seems to function, it teeters on the brink of a social basis that exists in the mode of being denied. It struggles to negate what is concrete in abstraction. This is a permanent crisis where postoperaists see only a recent one.

Key here is Negri's attack on dialectics in the name of a Spinozist embrace of immanence and monism. With this disappears the ability to grasp contradiction. Things cannot be two things at once, or contain within them the essence of another.

Form analysis is impossible. The strange situation whereby the results of human practice should assume transcendent forms of social domination slides entirely from view. Contradiction is mistakenly seen as relating to crisis, rather than capitalism itself. The ascription of crisis portrays a normal functioning broken by contradiction. Whereas in fact capitalism, to the extent it 'functions' in the way suggested, does so *via* contradiction. Central to this study, for example, are those contradictions between management and workers in the creative industries, whereby the same creativity and spontaneity on which the agencies rely must be stifled and reshaped to fit within controllable and commensurable constraints (see Chapters 9 and 10).

Negri's 'molecular' positing of a succession of self-contained paradigms, as Holloway notes (2002a), has the effect of rendering his argument functionalist. All things in a given historical juncture must always correspond to the correct paradigm. Even crises come to play their part in their unfolding. The paradigm is a framework to which all parts of reality must fit. There is no room for contradiction, or conflict.

But capital always struggles to measure, and what is measured always struggles back. The value-form sublates the qualitative incommensurability of feelings, dignity, desires- but never totally. There is *always* an excess left over that cannot be captured. This is not a novelty of Empire. It is as true for the industrial factory, where sabotage and subordination was rife, as it is for the social factory. And, confounding paradigms, it is as true for Fordism as for so-called 'post-Fordism'. This is where a 'molecular' micro-focus on the immediate forms taken by concrete labour fails. The forms of social mediation persist. And with them lasting contradictions Fragment-thinkers optimistically see as a sudden and liberatory crisis.

Marx's critique of political economy is all about understanding the *form* productive activity assumes. Crucial here is abstract labour- and not immediate concrete labour. Changes in labour-time and the composition of the labour cannot create in themselves a crisis of measurability. It is comforting to contend an incipient communism is around the corner owing to such changes. But placing the Fragment on Machines in the context of Marx's work as a whole gives little cause for comfort. Capitalism is characterised by categories of social mediation. They persist regardless of whether a worker uses a keyboard or a hammer, ideas or nuts and bolts. And in this, the case study in later chapters shows, is implied the persistence of means of measure and time discipline familiar to the pre-'social' factory. This is, we see in Chapters 8 and 9, because the social form assumed by labour in and through value's practical abstraction wields an effect on the content of labour- so the ways of measuring a given kind of labour do not live and die by changes in that labour, but in fact restructure it to conform to its metrics.

This gives pause for thought to those projecting Fragment-inspired pipedreams. The epochal crisis they posit is no crisis at all. On their terms, capitalism *is* crisis, for all involved. No amount of Spinozist optimism is capable of coming to terms with the theory and practice required to change it. And, I conclude in this chapter's remainder, we must look to elements of Marx's work other than the Fragment to overcome this impasse.

5.8. Beyond the Fragment?

As we have seen here, the Fragment on Machines casts a long shadow over postoperaist treatments of value. But, I would suggest, little thought has been given to the coherence of the Fragment within the whole body of Marx's work. Fragment-thinking tends toward a conventional understanding of the relationship between labour and value. Ironically, this productivist perspective belies the avowed post-workerism of its proponents. Their conceptualisation of a crisis of measurability

depends upon it. Value must relate directly to expended concrete labour for the latter's reduction to pose a threat. But it instead relates to abstract labour, which has no concrete existence (Bonefeld, 2010, p.260). As such, the Fragment sits uneasily in the development of Marx's value theory (Heinrich, 2013b). This accounts for its fragmentary, unpublished nature. Its crisis scenario implies a simplistic labour theory of value that Marx later outgrew. The Fragment can be considered only a partial viewpoint on value from a Marxian perspective. For this reason, it should not be extrapolated to a theory of the crisis of measurability and the law of value made to fit the conditions before us today.

Read along the lines set out here, measurement continues the same as always, something confirmed empirically later. The optimistic picture the Fragment foretells cannot be the case. The coercive social relations are still there, synonymous with measure, and sublated within it, contradictory and denied. Contra the postoperaists, value, on this account, always faces the conditions of crisis described by those foretelling its downfall. We will hear more of this in the next chapter. But here what is important is that this crisis cannot be fatal in the way that the Fragment implies. The Fragment runs counter to the whole endeavour of Marx's critique of political economy. We must, therefore, beware the siren calls of those who seek to tear the Fragment from its context within the unfolding of a fuller theory of capitalism. Its misguided application to the present wields real political efficacy. Its popularity may relate to the reassurance it offers to two diverse audiences. To those interested both in capitalism's continuation, a soothing requiem to its immeasurable productivity and peaceful passage of progress. To those seeking otherwise, the promise of its imminent transformation. From a critical Marxist perspective, both thrive off false hope. We can endow ourselves with real hope only through an initial moment of negativity. This is lacking in the techno-optimism of the Fragment-thinkers.

5.9. Conclusion

I will conclude with some broad theoretical assessments of the Fragment and its theoretical legacy in postoperaismo and its contemporary popularisers, and set out why this matters politically.

On one hand, postoperaist interpretations of the Fragment's realisation in immaterial labour are seldom immaterial enough. We will look into this further in the next chapter. Like the most conventional value theory, they emphasise labour's concrete expenditure over its abstraction. They extrapolate systemic change from the immediate form labour takes, ignoring its mediation. This supports the claim of a crisis mimicking that described in the Fragment. But the novelty it posits is not actually so novel after all, as I will go on to argue in the next chapter. The Fragment provides a faulty map which to read a mistaken prognosis. Marx would be as much to blame for this as Negri, had he intended it for public consumption.

On the other hand, postoperaist interpretations of the Fragment's realisation are not materialist enough. Negri's Spinoza-derived monism induces him to overlook the persistence of social relations of production. The shiny exterior of workplace change conceals continuing hunger, domination, separation and violence. Both sides-appearance in the value-form and essence sublated within- are missed. And with them the continuing and coercive role played by measurement within and without the sphere of production. This facilitates the claim of a capitalist collapse attended by an incipient communism.

A few pages of Marx helped get us here. But more pages still can help us get out, as we will see in Chapter 6.

6. IMMATERIAL LABOUR AND THE CRISIS OF MEASURABILITY

6.1. Introduction

The ideas around Empire and multitude discussed in the Chapter 4 and 5 have gained increasing resonances as the first decades of the 21st century progress, with interest and application in activist circles and elsewhere.²¹ Hardt and Negri's popularisation of postoperaist theories of immaterial labour, however, had a subtler impact, largely confined to academia and the art world (Graeber, 2008). Ideas akin to 'immaterial labour' are, after all, common currency in public discourse. The mainstream is well abreast of the same empirical shifts as described by Hardt and Negri. The move towards a service economy. The development of the creative industries. The prominence of cognition and emotional connection in contemporary workplaces. The fragmentation and dispersal of work time. The blurred line between work and leisure. The rise of information technology. The immense power of communicative networks. The proliferation of non-standard forms of employment and contractual arrangements. The trends to which theorists of immaterial labour react in delineating the concept are stark enough to have been covered extensively elsewhere. As such, the significance of the theory is mainly limited to the development of academic research agendas, and to debates about the changing face of labour. The concept's relevance to debates in Marxian value theory receives less attention. I seek to rectify this by foregrounding this aspect.

As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, the postoperaist tradition of autonomist Marxism and the world of Marxian value theory seldom meet. Noting the absence of any engagement with recent interpretations of Marx's theory of value, I will set out my attempt to bring such a meeting together in my analysis, which will be applied and illustrated in the case study of work in the creative industries that occupies the remainder of the thesis. Through a conventional application of the categories of Marx's theory of value, postoperaist theorists like Negri overlook both the abstract quality of value-producing labour (as conceptualised by the NRM) and the social relations of domination and coercion undergirding it (as conceptualised by Open Marxism). Measure, in other words- in its dimension as value and means of control- is still very much in force. My thesis contests the claim made in postoperaist literature that immaterial labour, exemplified in the kind of creative work that the case study in Chapters 8-10 surveys, precipitates a crisis in measurability that renders the theory of value redundant. In this chapter, I will use the theoretical approach developed in first two chapters to contest this claim. The combination of NRM and Open Marxism opens up critique on two fronts. Firstly, by emphasising value as subject to an abstraction owing to the move from concrete to abstract labour rather than the expenditure of concrete labour, the NRM interpretation of Marx's theory of value overcomes any objections based on the supposed immeasurability of labour-time in contemporary capitalism. Secondly, by emphasising the persistence of the social relations of production- of subsistence, social reproduction, labour-power, time discipline etc.- Bonefeld's Open Marxism suggests that the violence concealed in the value-form continues, despite the claims of postoperaists on its empirical and theoretical crisis. The critique has four prongs.

First, postoperaist theorists emphasise the novelty of the way in which immaterial labour surpasses and exceeds the law of value. Yet the thesis of immaterial labour, rather than surpassing the theory of value, does not go far enough. It is hamstrung by its insistence upon the novelty of that which it describes. A theory of value based upon the process by which value appears through the social validation of abstract labour

²¹ This chapter draws on an earlier version published as Pitts 2016a. It draws also, in certain formulations used, on material that has also appeared in Pitts 2016b.

negates the novelty of immaterial labour. It suggests instead that labour has always been in some way immaterial.

Second, Hardt and Negri suggest that immaterial labour renders all labour immediately abstract. But this attempt is hamstrung by their reliance upon an explanation of the abstract sociality of labour as consisting in the realm of production (or even prior to it). A more radical viewpoint suggests that it is instead constituted retrospectively in exchange.

Third, what postoperaists such as Hardt and Negri describe as 'immaterial labour' is not immediately abstract in its concrete performance. Concrete labour is productive of value only by means of its immaterial abstraction. This is a process of becoming which culminates away from the workplace in the sphere of exchange. This account disputes the association of immaterial labour with the production of immeasurable value. It thereby also negates the threat immaterial labour poses to the basis of capitalist valorisation.

Fourth, measure is validated in the same act of exchange which grants it its existence. Value and abstract labour exist only through their measure, by means of the social validation of labour as productive of value via the exchange of products of labour as commodities in the marketplace. Yet this measure is always struggled for in production itself. The capitalist need for commensuration always faces the qualitative complexity of reality. But this is a crisis so permanent so as not to be one at all. It proceeds initially in production, where the drive to measure manifests in early pre-emptory abstractions and ways of disciplining workers. And these are ungirded by the 'social relations of production'- in class, exploitation, struggle, violence, coercion etc.

6.2. Immaterial Labour and the Crisis of Measurability

The immaterial labour thesis was originally formulated by Maurizio Lazzarato (1996). It depicts a transformation of work in late capitalist economies. For Hardt and Negri, these changes are not so much numerically significant as cultural and social. The transition to immaterial, post-industrial labour is not a *quantitative* shift, but a change in the hegemony of certain kinds of activity within the world of work (2004, pp.107-9). According to Hardt and Negri, 'industrial production is no longer expanding its dominance', economically and socially (2001, pp.285-6). Take, for instance, the move from secondary to tertiary occupations characterised by 'the central role played by knowledge, information, affect and communication'. For Hardt and Negri, this shift does not mean that industrial production has ceased or will cease. Older forms of labour, such as manufacturing, become infused with an informational aspect, akin to how industrial production came to infuse agriculture in the past. As noted in Chapter 3, the creative industries and the ways of working they are typically associated with may conform to such a 'hegemonic' template today. However, the evidence gathered in the case study in the latter part of this thesis confounds the idea that this sector offers anything capable of challenging capitalist social relations in and of itself.

The first aspect of the transformation in the quality and the nature of labour that Hardt and Negri cite is the change from a Fordist to a post-Fordist model (2001, p.289). Under this new paradigm, labour is flexible, mobile and precarious (2004, p.112). In the rapid feedback loop of the Toyotist model, communication and information play for a pivotal role. The service sectors reveal an even 'richer model of productive communication'. This is immaterial labour, of which Hardt and Negri distinguish three types (2001, p.293). The first is the where industrial production has been informationalised, incorporating communication technologies. This turns manufacturing into more of a service, mixing durable goods with the immaterial. For instance, the most advanced automobile manufacturers incorporate the creative labour of designers and advertising professionals at an early stage (Pitts, 2015e). The

second is the immaterial labour of analytical and symbolic tasks, broken down into a division between manipulation and routine. This division could be applied to, on the one hand, games designers, and, on the other, games programmers. The third is the production and manipulation of affect, whether through virtual or actual human contact, of which care workers are one example.

Thus, postoperaist theorists suggest that labour becomes synonymous with the creation and manipulation of ideas, symbols, selves, emotions and relationships. Work comes to inhabit the full range of human capacities and activities. As such, the boundary blurs between work time engaged in immaterial labour and spare time away from paid employment. The activities of work take on the characteristics of those of leisure and of everyday life, and those of leisure and everyday life assume the characteristics of work. Immaterial labour thus transcends the formal confines of the working day to invest the whole of life with its value-producing processes. In response to this, theorists of immaterial labour posit a 'crisis of measurability' (Marazzi, 2008, p.43). The crisis arises from the impossibility of the quantification of work-time and value. This afflicts any application of the labour theory of value (Vercellone 2010). As Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadra assert, '[w]ith the advent of cognitive capitalism, the process of valorization loses all quantitative measuring units connected with material production' (2010, pp.238-239).

In a recent iteration (2013, p.75, p.87), Franco 'Bifo' Berardi indicates the theorisation of value and labour that such an account rests on. 'When you want to establish the average time that is needed to produce a material object,' he writes, 'you just have to do a simple calculation: how much physical labor time is needed to turn matter into that good'. It is impossible to 'decide how much time it takes to produce an idea', or 'a project, a style, an innovation'. In their production, 'the relationship between labor-time and value suddenly evaporates, dissolves into thin air'. This is because 'the productivity of the general intellect' is 'virtually unlimited' (2013, p.75). It 'cannot be quantified [or] standardized' and, ultimately, value cannot be measured in terms of time. But, posing a simple resemblance between labour-time and value, Bifo elides the abstract mediation of concrete labour in the value-form. These claims rest on a fundamental misreading of Marx's theorisation of the law of value, as set out in Chapter 9.

In this chapter I argue that the immaterial labour thesis brings into dispute only a traditional, orthodox labour theory of value. The conditions it describes leaves intact the abstract law of value by which capitalism operates. Theorists of immaterial labour are correct to say that the *labour* theory of value is redundant. Indeed, it was ever thus. Capital has always struggled in its attempts to render human labour productive against a 'crisis' of measurability. But it is *abstract* labour that enters into and sustains the social relationship of value, more so than that expended in the realm of production. Thus, capital has always faced the immateriality of the process of abstraction as a potential crisis of measurability. In this way, the existence of immaterial labour poses no threat to critical reinterpretations of value theory such as the New Reading of Marx. Postoperaists see immaterial labour as stealing away the empirical and theoretical foundations of the law of value. But an approach to value oriented around the 'social validation' of abstract labour (Heinrich, 2012, pp.50-51) places little importance on the possibility or impossibility of the quantification of working hours. This approach transcends the crisis of measurability posited in the postoperaist literature. It conceives of such a crisis as a permanent and in no way novel feature of valorisation. As we see in the case study, companies may struggle to bring measure to the work they command, but the measures they posit of that work contain all that is needed to overcome, by constructing the completion work in different ways.

6.3. Critiques of Immaterial Labour and the Crisis of Measurability

Previous attacks on the conceptual apparatus of 'immaterial labour' adopt a much different critique, highlighting enduring materiality (Banks, Gill and Taylor, 2013, Pt 2) or attempting the 'rematerialisation' of discourse around the topic (Doogan, 2009, p.6). My approach does neither, emphasising instead an *even greater immateriality* that both rests on the sublation of definite material relations and is expressed in them. In so doing, it contends that the concept of immaterial labour does not go far enough. The postoperaist theorisation of the relationship between labour, value and their measure inhabits an orthodoxy that is too 'materialist' by far, preoccupied only with the concrete and not the social forms it assumes. In this, I build on critical fragments concerning Hardt and Negri in the work of Michael Heinrich. The distinctiveness of this critique can best be examined by comparing it with another notable critique of Hardt and Negri from the perspective of unorthodox Marxism, in the work of the autonomist George Caffentzis.

Caffentzis on Hardt and Negri

George Caffentzis, from the autonomist perspective, has produced some of the most sustained value-theoretical engagements with Hardt and Negri's claims about immaterial labour and immeasurability. His criticisms arrive from a broadly similar scepticism as those voiced here, but with significant differences that help clarify the specificities of my approach.

Caffentzis dismisses both the concept of immaterial labour and that of the crisis of measurability, but differently to how I dismiss them here. In the first case, Caffentzis takes a 'materialist' perspective with reference to immaterial labour, assuming what he calls an 'extreme position' on its alleged non-existence. The immaterial labour thesis is wrong, he contends, because 'services, cultural products, knowledge and communication are "material goods" and the labour that produces them is material aswell', although, he admits, 'it might not always be tangible' (2013, p.177). However, here he refers not to the material undergirding of abstract labour in the sublated 'actual conditions of life' presupposing value production and commodity exchange, but more simplistically to the physical activities that produce the commodities and the concrete processes and forms through which they are consumed.

The products of services, from stylish haircuts to massages, are embodied material goods; cultural products like paintings, films, and books are quite material; communication requires perfectly material channels (even though the material might be "invisible" electrons); and finally, knowledge as presently understood is, like goals in soccer games, a specific material transformation of social reality. (Caffentzis, 2013, p.177).

But, as I will go on to show, such a critique of immaterial labour misses the mark. The problem with immaterial labour is not that it elides the material substrate of labour, but that it focuses too much on transitions in the material substrate of labour- of changes in the character and composition of the physical activities of concrete labour, and not enough on the significance of this activity under capitalism- which is to say, that its results appear in the value-bearing form of commodities, and the implications this presents for we think about labours relating to one another as 'labour'. The crucial thing here, then, is not concrete labour but abstract labour. The immateriality ascribed to contemporary labour and its products by postoperaists is insufficiently accommodating of the true immateriality that consists at the heart of abstract labour. And Caffentzis's critique of postoperaismo on this point makes what is essentially the same mistake- an inability to conceptualise labour in its specificity under the law of value, which is to say, as abstract labour.

This mistake extends to Caffentzis's defence of the law of value, and Marx's theory of it, against the claim of redundancy that issue from postoperaists like Negri. His critique of the purported 'crisis of measurability' focuses on the persistence of the law of value as a quantitative process and, more problematically, Marx's theory of value as a quantitative theory. This disregards the qualitative nature of both in their association with value as an abstract social relation of all things with all other things that assumes, via money, an objective economic form. It defends against the postoperaists something that is not really there to defend in the first place, and overlooks the social form dimension of value and the objective economic categories through which it moves and rules. Yet, despite this, Caffentzis's critique is, second to Heinrich, among the most sophisticated of immaterial labour and the crisis of measurability, against which the critique I pose here can be fruitfully compared in order to clarify my own approach.

Caffentzis makes three claims with which my own critique of immaterial labour and the immeasurability thesis broadly *concurs*. First, he argues that postoperaists like Vercellone are not concerned with the study of the real abstractions of capitalist rationality, as were forerunners of the NRM like Sohn-Rethel (2013, p.97). As Caffentzis notes, in the assertions postoperaists make about the obsolescence of the law of value, they miss how Marx was 'the original 'immaterialist''. '[A]s far as capitalism is concerned,' Caffentzis argues (2013), Marx saw capitalists as 'not interested in things, but [...] their quantitative value' which is 'hardly a material stuff!'. Postoperaists render obsolete the law of value only by holding to its most productivist interpretation, rather than the properly 'immaterialist' Marx. Postoperaist claims of the Fragment's realisation rest on a disavowed orthodoxy. Despite their professed anti-productivism, they present a conventional labour theory of value. This incorrectly emphasises labour's concrete expenditure over its abstraction in exchange. By conceiving it contrary to its reality, postoperaists can then challenge the continuing role of the rule of value.

Caffentzis points to the everyday persistence of measurement in all kinds of work. Far from crisis, it continues to function, just as necessary for capital as ever before. At the most basic level, 'the process of creating propositions, objects, ideas and forms and other so-called "immaterial products" [...] is a process in time that can be (and is) measured' (2013, p.111). This may differ from, say, the 'material' factory labour of Marx's own time. But it occupies time and is subject to measurement on this basis all the same. Caffentzis captures this well when he writes that the crisis of measurability 'does not seem to refer to what billions of people across the planet do every day under the surveillance of bosses vitally concerned about how much time the workers are at their job and how well they do it again and again' (2005, p.97).

Third, Caffentzis contends, measurability has always endured the uncertainty ascribed in the Fragment scenario. No commodity has ever had its value seamlessly read off from the amount of direct labour-time that went into its production. As Caffentzis contends (2013, p.112), this is as true for material commodities as it is for the immaterial goods and services emphasised by the postoperaists. This is because, as we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, the labour represented in the value of a commodity is abstract labour. This is measured on the basis of socially necessary labour time. This is determined by, as Marx writes (1976, p.129), 'the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society'. In other words, it is arbitrated not by direct, concrete labour time, but through social validation in monetary exchange. Value, on this count, always contends with crisis.

The *problems* with Caffentzis's critique of Hardt and Negri come when he engages with the value-theoretical foundations of the claims they make about immaterial labour

and the crisis of measurability. Caffentzis (2005, p.96) periodises Negri's work as, having rejected 'value discourse' in *Marx Beyond Marx*, graduating to an acceptance of value- although not its measurability- in his later work with Hardt. Whereas in the former, Caffentzis contends, Negri 'espoused excising the whole value discourse from the "usable" part of the Marxist canon' (2005, p.100), by *Empire*, value is back again, although not, Caffentzis asserts, in a conventional form recognisable from the Marxist tradition of value theory. In *Empire*, what Caffentzis labels the 'labour theory of value' is replaced by a theory of value as 'both immeasurable and beyond measure' (2005, p.96).

I differ on this interpretation of Negri. I see a common value theory uniting Negri's work pre- and post-Hardt, a conventional account of the relationship between value and labour that serves as handmaiden to the historical claims about immaterial labour and immeasurability that he eventually makes. This value theory is by no means unrecognisable from what has gone before in the Marxist tradition, but actually represents, once one strips away the lip-service paid to work refusal and anti-productivism, only the latest- and, admittedly, most interesting- appearance of a vulgar materialist, essentially substantialist understanding of the relationship between labour and value.

Caffentzis is correct to differentiate Hardt and Negri's account of the relationship between labour and value from Marx's, but incorrect as concerns a) the novelty of their position within the Marxist tradition as a whole, where substantialist readings of the LTOV are dominant, and b) precisely *why* Hardt and Negri's account of value deviates from Marx's theory as set out in *Capital*. The latter issue rests in Caffentzis's own reading of what Marx is talking about when he talks about value. Caffentzis critiques Hardt and Negri for discarding anything quantitative from the theory of value and retaining only that which is qualitative, so that labour and value are always 'unmeasurable "things-in-themselves"' (2005, p.100). This is contrary, Caffentzis says, to Marx's 'commit[ment] to creating a theory that could explain capital's quantitative character'. In this thesis, I advocate a Marx along these lines, interested in exploding the objective quantitative appearance of social forms. But Caffentzis seems to mean something quite different: a Marx that works with quantity rather than explodes it. For Caffentzis, although Marx was 'not a professional mathematician', his work lends itself profitably to 'an enormous amount of mathematical analyses of capitalism' (2005, p.100-101). And, in Hardt and Negri, the 'assumption of measurability', which Caffentzis sees as crucial to the mathematical possibilities afforded by Marx's quantitative theory of value, is done away with.

There are two issues here. The first is that Caffentzis characterises Marx's theory of value as *quantitative* theory of economics, an alternative political economy to the political economy he immanently critiques in *Capital*. But, as Bonefeld contends, the critique of political economy is not an alternative to its object but a *critical theory of society*, geared towards a theoretical confrontation not only with political economy but the objective economic categories it describes, as they present themselves under the abstract social rule of value. It is not an attempt to work, in a positive way, with these categories in the name of quantitative measure, but a means to explode, negatively, the equivalence and commensurability posited in quantity itself.

This is clear when one reads between the lines of Marx's immanent critique of political economy in *Capital*.²² As Jameson highlights, Marx persistently draws a 'chiasmic' kind of equivalence between the two terms of an equation. According to Jameson, Marx 'undermine[s]' the 'static or synchronic function of the equals sign'. This he does by relativizing each term based upon its position in the equation. By comparing two

²² This paragraph draws on formulations published previously in Pitts 2015f.

seemingly incomparable things, Marx generates a 'surrealist image'. The image achieves its surreal effect by 'juxtapos[ing] two objects as far from each other as possible' (2013, p.24). A fine example of this quoted by Jameson is Marx's equation consisting of 'one volume of Propertius and eight ounces of snuff' (Marx, 1990, p.28) Through such flourishes, Marx undermines the abstraction upon which equation depends. Marx abstracts from concrete properties so as to render absurd the practice by which this abstraction proceeds in society itself. These quantitative forays do not represent earnest appeals to mathematics or science. Rather the often humorous equations presented by Marx are fragments of an immanent critique of the equation itself.

Thus, Marx, as the critical theorist of capitalist society *par excellence*, can be seen not as an advocate of quantity but as its fiercest critic. Caffentzis pre-empted this objection by addressing directly the critical strands of Marxism, from Lukacs to, in the latter day, Holloway (to which we can add Bonefeld, Arthur et al) that seek to undermine the economic objectivity of capitalist social forms. For Caffentzis (2005, p.103), 'this skepticism towards the "false" objectivity of value, however, is often confused with a skepticism towards the value of objectivity itself. Whatever one might think about the value of objectivity, one should not confuse skepticism with regard to it and skepticism with regard to the value of commodity values.' Here Caffentzis equates economic objectivity with a kind of neutral, instrumental rationality.

This is best exhibited where he writes that 'bread baking does require knowing how many cups of flour must be mixed with how many cups of water to make dough, i.e., there is a value to objectivity' (2005, p.104). But what this spurious, simplistic example elides is that the objectivity involved in the measurement of ingredients for baking bread is not the same as the monetary and temporal measurement of value and abstract labour that, via the coins in our pockets and the clocks on the workplace wall, governs life and work under capitalism. The 'objectivity' of a bread recipe implies no necessarily coercive social relations, no impoverished actual conditions of life, and, most importantly, no totalising abstract social rule of value that brings all things into relation with all other things in a false equivalence.

Caffentzis seeks to save an idea of objectivity that, he suggests, is seemingly absent in claims that this or that thing is 'immeasurable'. For, he asks, how can we 'prove' what is or is not immeasurable without an objective benchmark for doing so (2005, p.101)? He places Hardt and Negri within the tradition of Lukacs, Holloway *et al* by virtue of what Caffentzis sees as their 'questioning and even putting a curse on measurement, scientificity, and any other objectifying process' (2005, p.103). In this, Caffentzis contends, Hardt and Negri discard any objective yardstick by which claims about what is and is not within or beyond measure can be verified. But this conflation of the claims of, on one hand, the critical Marxist tradition of Open Marxism and the NRM, with, on the other, postoperaist accounts of immeasurability and the irrelevance of the law of value, obscures more than it reveals.

Where Caffentzis defends economic objectivity explicitly, it remains present in Hardt and Negri implicitly. Caffentzis acclaims the quantitative aspect of Marx's theory of value, where Hardt and Negri silently advocate a reading of the LTOV as a theory of quantity, as a necessary foundation for their refutation of it- a refutation, let us note, that is based less upon a theoretical rejection than a historically-specific crisis in the supposedly quantitative functioning of the law of value Hardt and Negri hold Marx's theory to describe.

Thus, Caffentzis's critique has much in common with its object. On one hand, Caffentzis posits a simple, unmediated relationship between measure and quantity, free of a social form determination, and fit to work with at the level of mathematics,

uncompromised by fetishism. On the other, Hardt and Negri can only refute the law of value and the theory with which Marx analyses it on the basis of a most reductive understanding of its normal functioning where conditions of crisis are not present. This reductive understanding describes a process of objective measurement that can be analysed quantitatively under normal conditions, contrary to what the heretical, critical strand of Marx-interpretation I follow here would contend is the case: namely, that value is an abstract social relation understood qualitatively in order to explode the apparent objectivity of economic categories, rather than assuming their existence as neutral tools with which to work and understand the world better.

Caffentzis and Negri draw radically different conclusions from a similar reading of a very specific iteration of Marx's theory of value. Where the former announces its rude health, the latter announces its demise. As we shall see, the theoretical resources afforded by the NRM constitute a much stronger basis to critique claims about immaterial labour and the crisis of measurement at the level of the value-form, a critique reinforced via by its illustration in the case study presented in Chapters 8-10.

Heinrich on Hardt and Negri

Heinrich's 'social validation' reading of Marx's value theory refutes postoperaist critiques of the relevancy of the law of value. Against Hardt and Negri's extrapolation from changes in the immediate form of labour a theory of the obsolescence of the law of value, Heinrich focuses instead on the analysis of value's social form. The central movement of the law of value is the translation of multiple different and heterogeneous concrete labours into an abstract average. This is necessitated by the exchange relation. Hardt and Negri suggest this translation is redundant in the immaterial production of contemporary capitalism. The 'informatization of production and the emergence of immaterial labor' have led to a 'real homogenization of laboring processes'. This renders labour immediately abstract. It does not, as in Heinrich, become abstract via a process of social validation internal to the law of value.

One can concede the redundancy of the labour theory of value only when one takes it to refer to the attempted quantitative measurement of inputs and outputs. As Heinrich suggests, against their protestations to have surpassed the proletarian condition, they 'equat[e] value-constituting "abstract labor" with temporal, measurable factory labor'. But, as Heinrich states (2007), 'Marx's concept of "abstract labor" is not at all identical with a particular type of labor expenditure', but is rather 'a category of social mediation'. This applies 'regardless of whether th[e] commodity is a steel tube or care giving labor in a nursing home'. If Marx's theory of value relates not to quantification but to the analysis of form, there is little difference between material and immaterial labours. The value-form relates not to labour but to its commensuration in commodity exchange.

It is through recognition of this socially mediated form that the continuing relevancy of value theory is resistant to Hardt and Negri's claim of redundancy. Heinrich argues that the status of being a commodity relates not to anything material with regards to make-up or the character of the labour involved in a product's creation. Rather it relates to their '*social form*', namely, 'whether objects and services are exchanged' (2012, p.44). Thus, to a value theory geared towards the understanding of social validation, Hardt and Negri's empirical claims look different. The move from a society based upon the production and consumption of goods to one based upon the production and consumption of services poses no threat to the law of value. The different kinds of labour that these two phases imply matters little to their interpretation using the tools provided by Marx's theory.

To survive such attempts upon its validity, value theory must come down to an analysis of the value form, such as that introduced in Chapter 1 and operationalised

in the case study chapters. What Heinrich shows is that value theory in the 'traditional Marxist' vein has not always granted the form of value the attention necessary to ensure this validity. But the NRM secures the application of Marxian value theory to contemporary capitalism, including to work in the creative industries, as we shall see in Chapter 7 and those that follow. It does so in spite of the changes highlighted in postoperaist analyses.

6.4. Within and against the labour theory of value

The specificity of my critique of Hardt and Negri is clarified by its distance from that of Caffentzis. Where he critiques Hardt and Negri on the basis of materiality and objectivity, the critique I offer, inspired by Heinrich, attempts to unpick both.

Let us assume that value stems from measurable, concrete, performed chunks of labour time. On the basis of such an assumption, 'immaterial production' calls into question the labour theory of value. But the trouble posed to the labour theory of value owes not to the new status of immaterial labour, but the inadequacies of just such a 'labour' theory of value. Theorists of immaterial labour tend to affirm this orthodox 'labour' theory of value only to refute it. They repeat its uncritical ascription of value production to human labour and the time in which it takes place. This disavowed repetition then allows them to criticise other implications of that orthodoxy. Vercellone, for instance, sees the crisis of measurability rendering the theory of value redundant. But he can only do this by retaining an orthodox understanding of the basic fact of that theory of value. This is that labour is the 'substance and the source of the creation of value and surplus value'. In this account, value results from human labour, rather than as a residue of human labour in exchange (2010, p.92). It is this positive claim about value that facilitates the negative claim vis-à-vis the obsolescence of Marx's theory of it.

In a more upfront way, Negri accepts that his 'critique actively embraces the Marxian point of view' by foregrounding the concrete form of labour in the creation of value. The fact that he endows this concrete labour with an 'immaterial' aspect renders it no less concrete (2008, pp.67-68). Negri is emphatic that *'labour still remains the fundamental and sole element of value creation'* (2008, p.183). The only difference with past renditions is the nature of the new labour. It renders the theory of value irrelevant. It is boundless and immaterial, its value 'determined deep in the viscera of life' (2001, p.365). In the 'productive excess' that results (2001, p.357), the law of value 'reveals itself in its greatest expansion' (2008, p.183). This assertion is interesting. It suggests that only one part of the law of value and the theory that describes it suffers in this expansion: the criterion of measurability, of the ability of capital to measure and abstract value from labour. What expands, Hardt and Negri imply, is the status of labour as the source and substance of all value. Their insistence upon the latter makes possible their insistence on the former. But it also invites a critique of the conceptual framework that they use to make this argument. Claiming that the law of value expands when applied to labour beyond measure grants misplaced importance to labour and too little to measure. The reason that the law of value can stay intact at all is because measurement is still possible, in spite of the immaterial labour thesis. The everyday empirical instances by which this can be said to be the case are evident in Chapters 9 and 10.

Hardt and Negri, Vercellone and others remain wedded to an orthodox interpretation of the concept of the LTOV. At the same time, they seek to overcome it with 'new' facts. As Weeks (2011, p.93) suggests, 'there is a fidelity to Marx in Negri's work that might be construed to be as orthodox as any other'. Interpreted differently, the Marxian theory of value is harder to refute. My interpretation stresses not the material measurement of specifically *concrete* labour time, but *abstract* labour. Such a 'value-

form' perspective accommodate a much greater degree of immateriality. This enables me to perform the same manoeuvre as that I attribute to Hardt and Negri, only in reverse. I accept their understanding of the 'fact' of immaterial labour. But in the same movement I overcome it with a new conceptualisation of the relationship between labour-time and value. I dispute the special, unique and novel status afforded to immaterial labour, delineating how a theory of the value-form broadens the ascription of immateriality to *all* capitalist valorised labour.

I will now use this wider theoretical context as a springboard for the critique of three claims: the novelty of immaterial labour, the concrete existence of immaterial labour as immediately abstract and the status of immaterial labour as productive of immeasurable value. The critique of these claims challenges the terms of the mooted 'crisis of measurability'.

6.5. The novelty of immaterial labour

Postoperaists emphasise the novelty of immaterial labour and how it exceeds the law of value. New communicative, cognitive, and affective forms of immaterial production generate an immeasurable plenitude of value that capitalist frameworks cannot capture. In this rendition, immaterial labour is something completely new to capitalism. The practices and results of work appear as having been primarily material in the past. But today, such accounts suggest, a new immaterial aspect suffuses every step from labour to exchange.

Yet the thesis of immaterial labour, rather than surpassing the theory of value, does not go far enough. It is hamstrung by its insistence upon the novelty of that which it describes. This is because labour, value and exchange- and the interrelationship between them- have always had an immaterial existence.

A theory of value based upon the process by which value appears through the social validation of abstract labour negates the novelty of immaterial labour. It suggests instead that labour has always been in some way immaterial. This is especially so when we consider labour in the form in which it comes to the fore in capitalist production. This is as abstract labour, socially validated as value-producing in exchange. This hinges upon acceptance of the view that abstract labour has no concrete existence. Abstract labour does not 'happen', it is not 'performed', it is not observable. It exists only in process, in its becoming, and manifests only in exchange.

Thus, immaterial labour is nothing new, when thought of as a kind of labour with no material existence rather than a set of working practices incorporating emotion, cognition and affect instead of handiwork and physicality. On the understanding advanced here, value is incredulous to the specific activities of commodity creation. What is significant is the way in which these labours result in value. And the way in which these labours result in value is through their abstraction and validation as part of total social labour. This totality is ultimately immaterial, expressed in commodities and the proportions in which they exchange with one another. It is brought into existence only by means of the successful sale of a given product- the relationship of the creative industries to which we go on to interrogate more fully in Chapters 7 and 8.

6.6. Concrete existence and immediate abstractness

In postoperaist accounts of immaterial labour, there is a recurring claim that changes in the composition and character of labouring tasks renders concrete labour immediately abstract. Take Bifo, for instance, who suggests that the 'immaterialization of the labour process' witnesses a passage from 'the industrial abstraction of work to the digital abstraction of work' (2013, p.135), where the former constitutes an unfolding of abstraction, and the latter an immediate abstraction. What this implies is

a literalist understanding of abstract labour whereby it has a concrete existence in production itself. This is exemplified where, for instance, Bifo suggests that 'Marx's theory of value is based on the concept of *abstract work*' (2013, p.137, my italics). The linguistic lapse from 'labour' to 'work' is deliberate and all-too-telling, locating the abstraction of labour at the level of physical, concrete 'work', rather than the congealed factor of production 'labour'. Bifo elaborates further on this point, contending that, to be the 'source and measure' of value, this 'work' must 'sever its relation to the concrete usefulness of its activity and product'.

But whilst, as we have seen in Chapter 2, the *abstraction of labour* has a practical existence within the sphere of production by means of the practices of measurement and valuation inaugurated by the placing of a value on labour via the wage, it is by no means the case that *abstract labour itself* is 'done' in the form of 'work'. It is cohered through 'practically abstract' processes of measurement such as those studied in Chapter 10.

This category mistake makes possible a number of historical claims about the digitalisation or informationalisation of 'immaterial labour' potentiating an increased abstraction of labour *in its very doing*. We will deal with this due course. First, it is important to see these claims about immediate abstractness within the progression of Negri's path-breaking contributions to the development of postoperaismo, and specifically the philosophical revolt against mediation, abstraction and transcendence that we covered in Chapter 4.

We can trace the understanding of labour as immediately abstract in its concrete existence to Negri's 1978 lectures on the *Grundrisse*. Negri writes of the 'definition of work' that 'work appears as immediately abstract labour' (1992, p.10). Negri extracts from the *Grundrisse* a theory of the law of value whereby, rather than the law containing in a mediated, sublated way the exploitation of the workplace, it is immediately synonymous with it. The law of value is thus one and the same as the law of exploitation, as the worker experiences it, in the workplace, entirely free of any layers of mediation (1992, p.24). Between commodities and surplus value, Negri writes, there is no 'middle term' of value- rather the law of value relates directly and immediately to social antagonisms themselves, without any mediating or sublating 'other'.

In expressing, without mediation, social antagonism, abstract labour, Negri writes, 'traces a constituting process' whereby the abstraction and socialisation of labour- which, for Negri, takes place *within* production rather than exchange- expresses the class struggle over the needs of the working class, which they expand and demand capital satisfies through their immanent urges for less work and greater and more cooperative productivity and consumption. This 'progressive expansion' of needs' gives a 'concretization' to the 'progression of abstract and social labour'- in other words, giving it a real, lived form (1992, p.133).

Such insights weld Negri's nascent Spinozist elaboration of Tronti's Copernican Inversion into the threads of a future theory present in Marx's *Grundrisse*. As Arthur (2013, pp.4-5) rues, '[u]nfortunately, at one point [in the *Grundrisse*], Marx plays with the notion that the actuality of abstract labour requires the empirical emptiness of all labours', with this emptiness achieved in their concrete existence, via automation or deskilling, for instance. Somehow, this says, concrete labour can be emptied of content at the material level in order to make it more 'abstract', and not owing to its practical abstraction. However, as Arthur contends- and this is really a crucial point in all discussions of postoperaist claims about immaterial labour and so on- 'it is the social abstraction itself that is real, regardless of any change in material production' (2013, pp.4-5). By focusing so intensely on changes in the way we work, rather than

the significance that work takes in the form of its results, and by relying so myopically on the *Grundrisse*, a series of sketches and fragments for what would later become *Capital*, postoperaists attain only a partial perspective on the development of Marx's theory in full, and conceive value and labour in a way that deviates from Marx's theory only so as to dismiss it.

Having said this, at certain points in his earlier work, Negri does provide some sops to the conceptualisation of social mediation that makes the most developed iteration of Marx's theory of value possible. At one point in *Marx Beyond Marx*, Negri writes that '[w]ork is abstract in so far as it is only perceptible at the level of social relations of production' (1992, p.10). This suggests, at first glance, that work (read: labour) becomes abstract at a level removed from its immediate, concrete existence. But on closer inspection, the 'production' part is crucial. Negri appears to be saying that work is abstract at the level of its existence in production. But despite this, some sense of mediation remains. Negri gets close to a delineation of social form, but steps back again. And then, later in his lectures on the *Grundrisse*, Negri suggests that abstract labour 'concerns the mediation between the time of work and social production', which we can take to mean production for the purposes of commodity exchange (1992, p.162).

But these are outliers to the general thrust of Negri's gradual shaking off of Marx's value theory. As we saw in Chapter 4, by the time of *Empire*, these few vestiges of mediation are gone. With mediation goes the possibility of analysing the law of value in anything but the most rudimentary way. But 'immediacy', as we will go on to consider, offers an incomplete understanding of the strange and abstract world of value. The refutation of mediation serves as the handmaiden to a series of historical claims about the advent of immaterial labour and its immediate abstractness *qua* concrete existence.

Hardt and Negri suggest that immaterial labour renders all labour immediately abstract. Immateriality and informationality result in the 'real homogenization of laboring processes.' Diverse productive activities once attained parity through capitalist practices of measurement and valuation, with the ultimate arbiter the exchange of distinct commodities for money. But today, according to Hardt and Negri, concrete heterogeneity is abstracted from immediately, different labours commensurated in their very doing. Hardt and Negri posit that tools have 'always abstracted labour power'. The computer, as the 'universal tool', creates the possibility of this immediate abstraction (2001, p.292). Hardt and Negri are correct to say that 'abstraction is essential to both the functioning of capital and the critique of it', and to recognise the centrality of abstract labour in Marx's explanation of how value operates (2009, p.159). But they situate the abstract sociality of labour as consisting only in the realm of production (or even prior to it), whereas it is really constituted in a process of practical abstraction culminating in exchange, as conceptualised in Chapters 1 and 2 and explored further empirically in subsequent chapters. The historical emphasis upon the value-creating capacities of concrete labour expresses a political belief in the power of the working class. Hardt and Negri's insistence upon the antecedent nature of both abstraction and sociality vis-à-vis exchange is no different. It expresses a belief in the power of their own revolutionary subject: the multitude, the collective force of immanently cooperative immaterial labourers.

For Hardt and Negri, things *begin* from social labour (2004, p.144). They note that social labour is an abstraction. But they posit it in two problematic ways. It is first an abstraction forged *before* production in the cooperation immanent to immaterial labour. Second, it is an abstraction forged *within* production as the result of this labouring in common. Yet what I suggest here is that labour becomes social only when its various individual, private manifestations enter into abstract relation. This

takes place by means of the exchange of commodities in the marketplace. This is the means by which the sociality of labour is attained, even though it is 'posited' in production itself.

Labour is *ideally* social before becoming fully so. Capitalist production processes begin with money. And, as we saw in Chapter 1, money grants an early, anticipatory universality to the labour-power it acquires (Bellofiore, 2009). But things cannot *begin* with social labour in anything other than this ideal sense. Practices of measurement, quantification and classification are set in place within production to help this cohere. This is the focus of the case study that follows. But, ultimately, social labour arises through a process of gradual becoming. It cannot be realised until after exchange has taken place. And through this the sphere of exchange structures, rather than passively reflects, the direct and immediate character of concrete labour in production.

Hardt and Negri's conceptualisation of social labour builds upon the claim of novelty. They ascribe to present-day capitalism completely new characteristics that render obsolete the terms of its previous functioning. But these changes simply better exemplify that which was always true. There *are* existing assumptions to be invalidated. But it is not the perceived newness of contemporary capitalism that makes this invalidation necessary. Rather, capitalism past and present demands a more profound rethinking than that attempted by Hardt and Negri. To some they travel too far in their immaterialising portrayal of present-day conditions of labour and valorisation (Doogan 2009). But, perhaps, this portrayal is nowhere near immaterial enough.

According to Hardt and Negri, the law of value Marx describes is irrelevant. An 'important difference between Marx's time and ours' is the changed relationship between labour and value. A certain quantity of time no longer translates into a corresponding quantity of value. The measurability this assumes is no longer attainable in immaterial production. This is because the latter transcends all temporal boundaries (2004, p.145.). But I would argue that abstract labour-time has no necessary relation to expended concrete labour. It does not matter where or for how long labour takes place. As we will see in later chapters, the forces of capital abstract from labour a measure regardless of its reality, constructing a fresh one anew. This accepts the difficulty of translating labour-time accurately into an abstract quantitative measure. But I depart from the novelty and crisis Hardt and Negri ascribe to this. The process actually *works*, in spite of the seeming impossibility and immeasurability that confront it. Hardt and Negri have no theoretical resources to ask how. And, as the empirical substantiation of my theoretical exposition will later show, it is possible to corral evidence to suggest what they say is not so.

Hardt and Negri associate abstract labour with an amount of expended labour-time. But abstract labour does not take place. Although the process of practical abstraction can be experienced, which gives us ground to investigate it empirically in the first place, we deal here with an essentially 'non-empirical reality' as described in Chapter 3. As set out in Chapter 1, abstract labour has no concrete existence from which to establish a measure of its temporal duration. Although, as discussed in Chapter 3, it contains a definite non-conceptuality within this conceptuality, rooting it in real, concrete social relations, abstract labour is a conceptual residue of the act of exchanging two distinct commodities. Owing to this act- which is carried out preliminarily in production too- the labours that contributed to the production of these commodities enter a social relationship with each other, via an abstraction that irons out their specificities. The way Hardt and Negri phrase matters leads us to believe instead that, somehow, abstract labour is actually *performed*. Take the purported evolution of a body of workers for whom all work is a possibility, and for whom work can take place anywhere and everywhere in the entire fabric of life. This may be in

advance in the abstraction of labour. It offers new potential for the commensuration of heterogeneous concrete labours in *exchange*. But Hardt and Negri seem to suggest that the abstraction is complete in the very *doing* of that labour. Hardt and Negri give a reductive reading of the abstraction central to Marx's analysis of the relationship between labour and value. Because of this, they are able to claim to have done away with that analysis. Immaterial labour is taken to be a new fact that defies the underlying laws of capitalist society. But Hardt and Negri do not go far enough in the immateriality they ascribe. This failure blinds them to the continuing relevancy of what they contend is obsolete.

The underlying laws of capitalist society have been enduringly more immaterial than Hardt and Negri acknowledge. Negri may indeed be right in saying 'immaterial labour is abstract labour in its higher expression' (2008, p.75), but only insofar as abstract labour has *always been* immaterial. Abstract labour has no material, concrete form, only an immaterial, conceptual quality. It posits expended labour as somehow similar and commensurable, when in fact it is anything but. Practical abstraction in production helps serve to make this so, and value is 'posited' ideally at the commencement of production. Indeed, the changes in production Hardt and Negri describe may make this conceptual abstraction easier, establishing an informational infrastructure upon which all labours rely and through which they may be more easily compared. But this does nothing to contest the abstract functioning of capitalism Marx describes. Rather, it exemplifies its most developed manifestation.

In summary, Hardt and Negri go too far and not far enough. The main constraint is their conceptualisation of the compromised relationship between labour and value. They argue that in Marx's time, heterogeneous labour required equalization in order for exchange to take place, but today diverse labours do not need homogenization through the exchange abstraction. They become homogeneous by the computerization of production. By investing all labour with an informational aspect, this reduces labouring activity to abstract labour in its performance. There is thus no need for the process Marx describes.

But immaterial labour is not abstract labour in its performance. This is because abstract labour, as noted above, has no concrete existence in which it can be performed, observed or measured. Hardt and Negri get close to this with their claim of immeasurability, but with a misplaced focus. Rather than something that can occur in the guise of immaterial labour, abstract labour is a category of social mediation (Heinrich, 2007). Concrete labour-time is abstracted from and validated through the process of exchange. What is described as 'immaterial labour' is not abstract labour, because abstract labour has no concrete existence.

6.7. Immeasurable productiveness

What postoperaists such as Hardt and Negri describe as 'immaterial labour' is not immediately abstract in its concrete performance. Concrete labour is productive of value only by means of its abstraction. This is a process of becoming which culminates away from the workplace in the sphere of exchange. This account disputes the association of immaterial labour with the production of immeasurable value. It thereby also negates the threat immaterial labour poses to the basis of capitalist valorisation.

Ironically, the ascription of powers of value production to immaterial labour coincides with past physicalist readings of Marx's theory of value. Both imagine value to be created with every hour that the worker spends expending energy. In the new version, immeasurable value is sent spiralling into the ether for capital to attempt to capture. There are further similarities. For Hardt and Negri, the cooperative self-valorisation of immaterial labour is part of the revolutionary promise of a new class subject. This is

akin to how physicalist accounts endowed workers with immense power by means of a supposedly scientific 'labour theory of value'. The ascription of value production to one class was politically advantageous. Hardt and Negri and their theoretical companions are as productivist as the vulgar Marxism they wish to escape. Doogan (2009, pp.7-8) notes the prolific use of manufacturing as an example in accounts of post-industrial society. Points are extracted from this sector and extrapolated to the labour market as a whole. Similarly, *Empire* drips with fascination over the ins and outs of restructuring, downsizing and outsourcing. It expresses a materialist flipside of the unabashed productivist belief in the cooperative creativity of human activity, in spite of postoperaismo's anti-work ethos.

Vercellone (2010, p.105) contends that 'the source of the 'wealth of nations' rests on [...] productive cooperation', or 'living labour'. I deny this value-productivity not only to immaterial labour, but to all labour in and of itself. I would suggest instead that the types of cooperative sociality heralded by the multitude blossom only in the market, in exchange. Up to the point at which it is validated as such by successful exchange of the good or service it renders, labour is not social, cooperative or productive. To repeat: labour produces value only in its appearance as abstract labour, and this is a factor of exchange rather than of production. Abstract labour may assume an early, anticipatory existence during the time in which work takes place (Harvie, 2005). But the point remains the same: productiveness is feature of exchange rather than of production. We see in the case study in Chapters 8, 9 and 10 how imperatives from outside production in the market structure what goes on in the workplace, and it is via the practical abstraction enforced by management that the cooperative sociality coheres, and not, as dismissed in Chapters 4 and 5, any autonomous or multitudinous constituent power.

The postoperaists place great importance upon a productivist belief in human labour as the source and substance of all value. But like any series of concrete actions, expended immaterial labour does not produce value in and of itself. This has significant implications for other aspects of the postoperaist treatment of immaterial labour. Not least among these is the claim that contemporary capitalism finds itself faced with a crisis of measurability. Hardt and Negri's eulogising of immaterial labour rests on the assumption that immaterial labour is productive of value. But it is productive on an unquantifiable and unrepresentable scale, resulting in a 'crisis of measurability'.

There is an air of celebration in the postoperaist treatment of the immeasurable self-valorisation of immaterial labourers. The outcome is that they champion value as a positive category rather than a relation to be negated and destroyed. This is serviced by the situating of immaterial production within the realm of concrete labour. However, as we have seen, a theory of value emphasising the social validation of abstract labour tells a different story. It holds that it is abstract labour that determines value, rather than concrete. I conceive abstract labour to be something fully established only by the exchange relation to which the practical abstractions that populate production are subservient. It comes about as heterogeneous individual labours enter into abstract equivalence with one another. In this movement they become properly 'social'. Abstract labour both produces value and is produced by it. It acquires existence as value in the successful sale or exchange which ascribes value or worth to something. That something then becomes a commodity, where once it was only a mere product of labour.

Immaterial labour is not immeasurable, because value relates to labour's abstract residue in exchange and not its concrete practice. In this sense, it has always been impossible to effectively measure value in relation to concrete labour, only mere guesswork and estimation pending exchange. Value's measurement occurs in the

same act of exchange which brings it into existence, by means of the social validation of labour as productive of value via the exchange of products of labour as commodities in the marketplace. Yet, as noted already, this measure is always struggled for. The uphill struggle to commensurate in conditions of qualitative heterogeneity is the focus of the case study that follows in Chapters 8, 9 and 10.

6.8. Conclusion

The conceptualisation I have presented escapes the threat posed to orthodox versions of Marx's value theory by the thesis of immaterial labour. Against postoperaist perspectives, this recalibrated theory of value reinstates the ability to speak of measure. One can do so regardless of any mooted 'crisis' afflicting its application. Indeed, I have identified this crisis as a largely constant factor against which capital must struggle. Value itself comes into being at one and the same time as its measure. What 'crisis' there is in this process of becoming is that crisis faced by the circuit of capital when bringing this measure into existence.

In this chapter I have extended an understanding of the immateriality of production to the nature of capitalist valorisation in its pure form through time. This surpasses the thesis of immaterial labour. It reveals the crisis of measurability to be conditional on a certain understanding of how labour and value interrelate. Immaterial labour's purported challenge to the theory of value feeds upon a traditionalist interpretation of what the law of value is and can be. Any orthodox representation of the possibilities of Marxian value theory stands wide open to the challenge mounted by immaterial labour. An interpretation informed by the NRM is better equipped to deal with it.

From an analysis of the value abstraction, one can craft a theorisation of value that accommodates and extends the conceptualisation of immaterial labour. By means of this extension, we exceed existing conceptualisations of immaterial production as concrete practice. It is instead possible to situate immateriality in the capitalist process of valorisation as a whole. The redundancy of the theory of value is conceded on this terrain only when taken to refer to the attempted quantitative measurement of inputs and outputs. When it becomes a question of what Heinrich (2007) calls a 'category of social mediation' things take a different complexion. What matters is that concrete labour is abstracted from and validated through the process of exchange which confirms a good or service as a saleable commodity. As we will see in the next chapter, this could be the provision of a car, a viral ad, or a brand strategy. It is recognition of this that I state the continuing relevancy of value theory, and resist any claim of redundancy founded upon a crisis of measurability.

It is important to note that Lazzarato, Negri and others have played a significant part in highlighting profound changes in the sphere of production in capitalist societies. But they have made the error of extrapolating from these changes the notion of a crisis of measurability. They confuse the changes that *have* taken place in production with a crisis of measurability that has not. This is because they misunderstand the nature of labour, of value, and of measure. Value's measurability lies elsewhere than in production. It arises in and through social validation. Therefore, the changes in concrete labour matter little to the form that measure takes, or the degree of its possibility or impossibility. What counts and is counted is abstract labour, regardless of evolutions in the world of work.

7. THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN THE CIRCUIT OF CAPITAL

7.1. Introduction

As Ursula Huws notes, the shift to a marketplace of immaterial goods and services has led some to re-evaluate the relevancy of Marx's labour theory of value (2014, p. 81).²³ 'If value is observably being generated from some activity,' she writes, 'the tendency is to search for the commodity at its source' (2014, p. 87). The creative industries exemplify much of what is at stake in the ongoing re-evaluations of Marx's theory of value examined in the last three chapters.

As we have seen, some interpret these changes using postoperaist or postoperaist theories of immaterial labour. For such approaches, creative industries represent the novel immateriality of post-Fordist production. According to Lazzarato, immaterial labour is 'the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity'. It incorporates 'activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion' (1996, 133). The cooperativity of this labour is immediate and immanent, rather than coerced. Thus, it creates value beyond measure. Theorists of immaterial labour endow the kind of practices found in the creative industries with novelty and inventiveness. They suggest that their powers of value production are novel and inventive in three ways. First, they are greater than other industrial contributions. Second, they are immeasurably so. Third, in this regard, they are something new and unseen.

In assessing the theory of immaterial labour as it applies to the creative industries, I will focus on the work of one postoperaist thinker in particular, Andrea Fumagalli. Within that tradition, Fumagalli's work stands out as an attempt to apply postoperaist categories to fields such as the creative industries. Fumagalli engages, in a series of papers published over the last decade (Fumagalli, 2011, Fumagalli and Lucarelli, 2008, Fumagalli and Morini, 2010, 2013), with the shift towards 'cognitive capitalism'. His work explores what this entails for value theory.

Fumagalli focuses on the hegemonic position of 'knowledge work' in contemporary capitalism. He associates this with increases in productivity. For Fumagalli, productivity gains arise from the 'increasing return effects and absence of scarcity' in knowledge work. This is because knowledge 'is not a rival but a cumulative commodity' (2011, p.86). Industrial activities based on knowledge include advertising, design, marketing and branding. Fumagalli holds them to be unassimilable to the notions of productivity found in previous industrial paradigms. This owes to the 'general intellect' of immediate cooperative creation that the thesis of immaterial labour describes. This, Fumagalli suggests, increases 'the achievable level of social productivity'. In so doing, it surpasses existing understandings of what productivity is and can be (Fumagalli and Lucarelli, 2008, p.8). There are 'new factors that generate the gain of productivity' in so-called 'cognitive capitalism'. These entail the 'non-measurability of the productivity of knowledge through the traditional quantitative methods' (2008, 10). This crisis of measurability puts at risk the applicability of a Marxian theory of value. Value transcends the sphere of production. It is now generated by a novel dispersion of cooperative creative capacities through informational networks. This is very relevant to creative industries such as branding, design and advertising. In these sectors, Fumagalli (2011, p.90, p.97) suggests, the symbolic imaginary integrates consumption more closely within the productive moment. Valorisation occurs not only in production, but in realisation, by means of consumption. Fumagalli writes that

²³ Earlier versions of this chapter have been published as Pitts 2015a and Pitts 2015c.

the value of a commodity is no longer merely definable by “the necessary working time”; to the value [...] should be added the value deriving from the degree of social symbolic nature that it contains. When its immateriality increases, the symbolic value of commodity becomes even more apparent. It is on this edge that the relationship between production and realization [...] is played. The valorization of the commodity no longer occurs within the productive process alone but, as the immaterial production has become production of imaginaries, it occurs when the imaginary realized itself, at the very point of consum[ption]: it is the result of what we can define the *brandization* process [...]. It does not relate to the mere act of consumption. When the commodity becomes a symbol, there is no difference between production and consumption, namely: there is no clear cut between production and realization. (2011, p.90)

Fumagalli asserts that this process leads to a situation whereby ‘brandization’ does not only realise value, but *adds* it to the commodity. This occurs through ‘the increase of its symbolic significance and to the capacity to generate a shared imaginary on the part of consumers’. To this ‘corresponds an increase of the value of commodity’. This proceeds through ‘common relational activities’. These occur through immaterial production’s dispersed cooperative and communicative networks (2011, 97).

I will return to Fumagalli at the end of the chapter. But first, I will draw on some of Marx’s writing around the issue of production and unproductive labour, read through a NRM prism, in order to situate what exactly it is creative industries do in the production and circulation of value. I find that Fumagalli’s fixation on the novelty of the ‘added value’ they create is wide of the mark, and does not quite capture the fundamental role they assume in the selling of goods and services as commodities, the *sine qua non* of value. Through this we can conceptualise the specificity of the market-mediated relationships of exchange into which the creative agencies encountered in Chapter 8 enter, which in turn are the context for the concrete social relations and practical abstractions investigated in Chapters 9 and 10

7.2. Social validation and value creation

It is in Marx’s considerations of productive and unproductive labour that we find his most direct engagement with the labour of circulation, such as that found in graphic design, advertising and branding, and its role in value production. Inflecting my interpretation of these passages with a NRM-inspired understanding of social validation, my account moves away from an intrinsic picture of where productiveness lies. Instead, it gravitates towards one that describes a process of abstraction whereby labour is rendered productive.

Although it has a gradually cohering identity at earlier stages, the category of productiveness is an assessment achieved only at the culmination of this process. Where many orthodox treatments of the topic see the distinction between productive and unproductive labour *prior* to the law of value (Mohun 1996), I support Harvie’s contention (2005, p.61) that the opposite is the case: whether something is productive or not is arbitrated internally to the value relation, and cannot pre-exist it. Productiveness is an outcome of the movement of the law of value, the abstraction of concrete, private labour as a part of the social whole in exchange. The exchange of commodities by means of money is the movement by which labours enter into the social totality of abstract labour. And, by helping this happen, creative industries play a central part in the value abstraction.

I therefore situate the creative industries at a pivotal position crucial for the understanding, in Chapter 8, of the particular economic context in which they sit. Their pivotal role relates to their endowment of goods and services with a sellability that, by

when successful, renders in retrospect the labour expended in their production socially valid as productive of value. This it does by effecting successful exchange, which, as we have seen in Chapter 1, is the criterion for social validity. It determines whether a given good or service can be said to be value-bearing or not, and the labour expended in its production productive of value. But for this to happen, there is a considerable effort to endow a commodity with a social dimension whereby it can stand in relationship with other commodities through the mediation of monetary exchange. I attribute this contribution to the labour that takes place in the realm of circulation. In this case, this includes graphic design, advertising and branding.

This labour of circulation is traditionally conceptualised as 'unproductive' in the Marxist canon. But, by a close reading of Marx's writings on what he called the 'work of combustion' in the second volume of *Capital* (1992), we can craft a radically different interpretation of the determination of production and unproductive labour that places this combustive work front and centre. And for us, this work is synonymous with that of the graphic designers, brand strategists and other creatives investigated in this study. As we will assess in subsequent chapters, via the client relationship, this pivotal position has certain impacts on the structure and experience of the work these creatives do.

7.3. The Work of Combustion and the Form-Giving Fire

In the second volume of *Capital* (1992), Marx at one point refers to the labour that takes place in the sphere of circulation as that of the 'work of combustion'. This work of combustion, Marx asserts, produces no value. But the work of combustion is essential for value to come about. He uses a scientific analogy to illustrate this. 'This work of combustion does not generate any heat,' Marx writes, 'although it is a necessary element in the process' by which combustion takes place. It uses up energy but is necessary for heat's generation (1992, pp.132–133).

So, although combustion uses up energy in a supposedly 'unproductive' way, it would be hard to deny that it is a prerequisite for the production of heat. Departing from Marx, I suggest that it does this by realizing the potential heat-productiveness of the different elements involved. We might situate the creative agencies covered in the next chapter in an analogous relationship to the production of value. They bring about value through their facilitation of opportunities for the exchange of products of labour as commodities. In so doing, they help make possible the production of value. This gives them a pivotal position vis-à-vis capitalist valorisation, the implications of which I explore further in the next chapter.

I will go on to delineate the theoretical basis of this assertion further. But for now it is worth considering the practical dimensions of this 'work of combustion' as it exists in the creative industries. One might draw a parallel between Marx's utterances on the 'work of combustion' and those he makes on the subject of labour's 'form-giving fire'. He writes in the *Grundrisse* that '[l]abour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things'. In turn, 'the transitoriness of the forms of things is used to posit their usefulness' (1993, pp.360–361).

The work of combustion may be seen as precisely this 'form-giving fire'. It posits transitory usefulness in the way described above. It gives exchangeable 'forms' to the various heterogeneous 'contents' passed on from the realm of production proper. It makes these forms desirable on the basis of their difference or specific quality. In so doing, the combustive work of advertising, branding and graphic design helps organize the monetary exchange of products of labour as commodities. This exchange grants them value and attaches to them a price. Without this, no value would come about.

In his critical treatment of Marxist political economy, Asger Jorn develops this notion of 'form-giving fire' (2002). He suggests that creative workers perform an essential function in capitalism. They create the specific forms which commodities take on the market. The basis for Jorn's contention is that creative workers do not make value in and of themselves, but rather value persists in the difference that they create. This difference manifests in the plenitude of styles, fashions and trends one finds for consumption on the capitalist commodity market. It is brought into being by Jorn's creative elite (Wark, 2011, p.89). It is this creative elite that 'give[s] form to value', by 'renew[ing] the form of things' and creating the difference in which value consists (2011, pp.84–85). The creative elite are the producers of the form rather than the content of commodities (2001, n.33, p.89). Indeed, the commodity as it sells in its fetishized existence is pure form, pure symbol, incredulous to content. It need only be desired to be successfully exchanged in the marketplace, regardless of underlying characteristics. It is owing to this that value can attach itself to something in the first place.

Jorn touches upon something important and significant in the role that creative workers and creative industries play in capitalism. He reasserts that which Marx only implied in his discussions of 'form-giving fire' and the 'work of combustion'. Valorization proceeds not through the manufacture of specific goods or services. Rather, it proceeds through the manufacture of desirable forms, incredulous to content.

Jorn's thesis of the creative elite and their production of forms harkens back to a distinction which Marx himself makes. This is that between form and content in productive and unproductive labour. Marx suggests that productive labour is pure form without content. He writes in his *Theories of Surplus Value* (1861-63) that 'the designation of labour as productive labour has absolutely nothing to do with the determinate content of that labour, its special utility, or the particular use-value in which it manifests itself. The same kind of labour may be productive or unproductive'. Thus, it does not matter whether labour is productive or not. Labour itself may in fact be entirely peripheral. Its content must be given form to be said to be productive of value. Advertising and other such industries oriented towards exchange in the sphere of circulation create this sellable form. This pure symbolic form is indifferent to its particular content. This is an aspect which becomes apparent in the periodic scandals about consumer goods purporting to be something that they are not. This may be horsemeat masquerading as beefsteak or quack medicine masquerading as miracle cures. As Baran and Sweezy (2013) note,

advertising campaigns if sufficiently large, persistent, and unscrupulous (availing themselves of such methods as subliminal suggestion and the like) can sell to the consumer 'almost anything.' This contention is supported by some of the most authoritative experts in marketing techniques, one of whom observes that 'a superior product means superior in the eyes of the consumers. It does not necessarily mean superior in terms of objective value or according to laboratory standards' [...]. The most striking examples of the capacity of advertising to generate demand for worthless or even harmful products have recently been provided in the area of pharmaceuticals, cosmetic products, and the like.

The particular content of the commodity that is sold is not at stake. The specific labour to which it owes its material existence, as good or service, matters little. What counts is the form in which it sells. As we have seen, Marx implies the irrelevance of labour's content. We might infer that the latter depends on the particular form the labour takes, in its guise as abstract labour. It is by being abstracted from, after the fact, that labour attains full 'productiveness'. This abstraction is possible only through the exchange of products of labour as commodities. But for this requires a considerable effort to create a commodity in its full social dimension, as pure form without content. It is to the labour

that takes place in the realm of circulation, such as advertising, that we can attribute this contribution, and it is to this that we can attribute their pivotal position along the circuit of capital, with knock-on impacts for the work that takes place within them, explored further in Chapters 8-10.

7.4. Productive and Unproductive Labour

The implicit tendency of orthodox approaches is to relegate the labour of circulation to a secondary position vis-à-vis the realm of production. Thinking about practices as advertising and graphic design, I challenge this relegation. In an important contribution to existing debates, Harvie (2005) makes the claim that all labour is productive of value. He suggests that the labour involved in circulation such as advertising and other professional services is as productive as any other labour.

The labour that exists in the realm of production produces the goods that are later sold as commodities- the future bearers of value, posited as such by the monetary beginnings of the production process. But it is non-productive in the sense that it does not really matter whether or how much of it takes place. All that matters is that something attracts a price at the end of it all. It is helpful, of course, that labour is expended to create a specific use-value that can hold a distinct appeal to consumers. Yet it is not necessary to generate a specific use-value for it to retail as one on the market. A clever and well-targeted advertising campaign can achieve this, for instance. Furthermore, it is helpful that labour is expended in order to subject it to measurement. We examined why labour taking place in time and space is considered important for capitalist measurement in our assessment of the '8Cs' in Chapter 1. Measurement is part of the process of abstraction which brings all things into social relation with all other things. But even here, the abstraction and commensuration of labours as parts of the total social whole can be effected in retrospect. This can occur with or without a corresponding expenditure of labour at its basis. Thus, it may be a precondition of the production of value that the thing sold should have had some kind of labour input into its production. But it is neither necessary nor sufficient that such labour should take place. As long as something sells, value appears.

One might just as easily say, then, that due to the quintessence of its role, the labour of circulation is the only labour productive of value. But this would be to adopt an understanding of productiveness entangled in the conceptual framework of orthodox approaches. Value is 'produced', if we wish to use the traditional understanding, on a continuum that includes the labour that takes place in the realm of production. But this continuum has its culmination only in exchange. This culmination comes via those who service the ends of exchange, i.e. those involved in the labour that takes place in circulation, Marx's 'work of combustion', among which number the creative areas of activity surveyed in the next chapters.

Without this culmination, value would not be present to have the understanding of its having been produced applied to it. The labour that goes into the production of a value-generating commodity does not produce this value, but, as we saw in Chapter 2, produces the *bearer* of value. Value itself is a social relation between these bearers. And, in order for this social relation to be fully established, commodities must exchange by being sold for money. Graphic design, advertising and branding, by intervening in the images and meanings applied to goods and services in order to sell them, are central to capital's attempts to bring this social relation into existence. Therefore, I do not claim that Marx's 'work of combustion' is the *only* productive labour, or represents a way of 'adding value' in the manner Fumagalli contends. Rather it intervenes on a deeper level, on the possibility of pinpointing 'production' itself, owing to its pivotal role in cohering the social relationship between commodities that makes value apparent, and thus the labour that produced its bearer.

7.5. Creating Commodities from the Products of Labour

Thus, rather than anything intrinsic to concrete labour itself, the productiveness of labour is a factor of its end result. Its ultimate arbiter is whether the good or service it produces sells as a commodity. It is this that brings the labour performed into relation with all the other labours of society as part of an abstract whole. This validates the labour as part of the 'socially necessary' labour of society. It confers upon it the standard of productiveness. This is as a result of the good or service it produces gaining its own confirmation of its status as a full commodity, an object of exchange or sale. This is a principally retrospective activity. The 'validation' of past labour as productive conjures a new purely symbolic and abstract quantity of labour. This is nothing but a conceptual, imaginary device by which the social totality of productive activity is pictured. It helps bring its goods and services into a relationship of commensuration and equivalence with one another.

I therefore agree with Harvie, who contends that '[l]abour which is 'unproductive' is [...] categorised as such because commensuration through market exchange does not take place' (2005, p.150). That labour is productive by commensuration through commodity exchange is not restricted to the moment that a product hits the market. The commensuration is that by which different concrete labours enter into a relationship of equivalence with one another. They thus attain abstractness, sociality and productiveness. This is a process that unfolds gradually within production and without, culminating fully only in exchange. As Harvie writes, 'a thing- commodity – is produced, and then it just is, until it is sold – its value realized'. Helping this come together are those recruited by the capitalist, such as 'marketers and advertisers, credit-providers and retailers' (2005, p.152). Without these functionaries, the commodity moment would not come, and nothing would be 'productive' in any real sense at all.

Harvie uses advertising as an example of this. The particular use-value that the service commodity of advertising offers to the capitalist is that it facilitates exchange, validating abstract labour as productive, and thus bringing value into full reality. This it does by means of the sale of a product of labour as a commodity on the market. Thus, as we see in Chapter 8, advertising insulates the capitalist against the uncertainties of circulation. Not least among these is that of whether a commodity will sell. Advertising also produces use-values for consumers. It conjures 'imagined, non-corporeal qualities of products', such as the brands with which one identifies when buying a material good. The two, Harvie suggests, cannot be 'disentangled'. The brand is completely tied up with, part of and implicated in the specific product purchased. We 'buy not only the tangible good, but the identity too' (2005, p.153). Traditionalist accounts of circulation labour overlook this kind of production. This provokes Harvie (2005, p.144) to pose an important question:

How do we understand the fact, for example, that a pair of Nike trainers costs four or more times as much as a physically similar 'no logo' pair? If all the creative human activity involved in designing (beyond the physical design of the shoes) and marketing the Nike product is unproductive, adding nothing to the shoes' value, then the values of the Nike and 'no logo' trainers will be similar. A significant divergence of price from value is the only result. How is this to be explained?

Something is missing in accounts that cast the circulation labour that creates the Nike brand as somehow irrelevant to value and its production. It is not simply that advertising and its counterparts adds a 'cultural content' (Lazzarato, 1996) to the commodity, on top of an objective sphere of use-value. Rather, it actively intervenes in the latter. The production of a use-value may be the original impetus out of which a good or service arises. It furthermore grants the basis for a good or service exchanging as a commodity with a specific purpose or desirability attached to it. But

more must be done to create this desirability than simply to produce something useful. Use is the basis of this desirability. But it may not be quite enough to foster the conditions by which a product of labour can be sold and thus attain the fully-fledged status of a commodity. Something more must happen to grant the good full commodity status and render the labour expended abstract and, thus, productive.

7.6. Moving Goods and Moving People

The facilitation of use is a precondition of something being desirable and specific enough in its attributes to constitute a worthwhile purchase. Creative industries help create the correct environment in which use-value means something. This establishes the basis and around which exchange-value can cohere, and defines the creative industries' specificity within commodity circulation and the circuit of capital, and, with this corporate context, the labour that takes place within them.

Value depends upon the creation of an exchange relation between commodities (and thus the labours attached to them) through the mediation of money. This is, as we have stated, based upon someone wanting something. Use-value is one part of this, but the category of use is a potentiality unlocked only with the conditions in place for use to actually happen. Things will not be used unless they sell. Things will not sell unless they are desirable in some way. Indeed, Marx suggests as much. He writes that the production of a commodity succeeds by 'creating in consumers a want for its products as objects of consumption' (Marx, quoted in Gough, 1972). Desire, and the want that Marx contends it 'implies', are not extraneous to the production and consumption of use-values, but rather essential to it.

In *Capital* Volume 2 (1992), Marx spends some time discussing the role of the transport sector in capitalist valorization. Marx's treatment of transportation parallels that I have offered of the role the creative industries assume in the production of value. Marx situates transportation in production rather than circulation. This is because it does not present itself as a loss or deduction to the capitalist, unlike other ancillary functions. Noting that 'the transport industry sells [...] the actual change of place', Marx focuses on the movement of people to commodities and commodities to people. This constitutes both a production process and an act of consumption. Movement is a very specific and particular commodity in itself (1992, p.135).

Marx writes that 'the use-value of things is only realized in their consumption, and their consumption may make a change of location necessary, and thus, in addition, the additional production process of the transport industry. The productive capital invested in this industry thus adds value to the products transported' (1992, pp.226–227, my italics). Transportation, then, helps in the production and realization of value by bringing goods to people and people to goods. It both produces a commodity – the movement of goods and people – and helps in the production and realization of value – by bringing goods to people and people to goods. It does not present itself to capital as a loss in the same way as the activities of circulation.

The service performed by transportation would not appear to be something limited exclusively to trains, planes and automobiles. We can associate Marx's remarks with the development of a much different infrastructure of activities and industries. Advertising, graphic design and branding are similarly committed to bringing products to people and people to products.

According to Raymond Williams, advertising organises the market. It helps standardise, rationalise and render predictable the patterns of consumer behaviour and choice. Williams highlights the role taken by the advertising industry in the regulation and reportage of the distribution and consumption of goods. This is a crucial response to the organisational difficulties of disconnected, large-scale

industrial production. Advertising is a device for smoothing and steadying distributive channels. It is a lightning rod for demand, establishing clear indications for capital to act upon (2005[1980], p.186). We can see evidence of its function as such in the next chapter.

Fields such as marketing, advertising, graphic design and sales bring products to people and people to products. In so doing they turn simple products of labour into commodities. They create the bond and the conditions by which it is possible that something exchanges or sells as a commodity in the first place.

Marx isolates transportation as inhabiting a separate realm of value-productiveness that somehow eludes all the other activities of 'circulation'. But can the same not be said of those circulation functions such as marketing, advertising and sales? Do they not perform such a similar movement of goods and people to increase the possibility of products of labour exchanging as commodities? Marx's reading of transportation extends to the roles he relegates to the realm of circulation. Consumption, after all, is necessary for value to come about. Whatever contributes towards, induces or facilitates consumption is thus a component of the *production* of value. It *realises* the potential productiveness of the labour that has gone into fashioning or performing the good or service sold as a commodity.

My understanding of Marx on transportation resonates with that of Huws. Huws (2014, n.31, p.106) notes that the 'special exception' Marx makes for transport workers may owe to the revolutionary potential they possessed at the time. They were at the forefront of class struggle, with strong organisation and frequent participation in industrial action. But, for Huws, this 'special exception' can extend to 'other forms of labour involved in getting products to market'. She cites Marx's statement in the *Grundrisse* (1993, pp.533-4) that 'the bringing of the product to the market [...] belongs to the production process itself. The product is really finished only when it is on the market'. As Huws notes, on this basis, 'a wide range of functions to be found in a modern corporation can be assigned to this directly productive category'. This includes 'marketing, logistics management, distribution, transport, customer service, retail and wholesale sales' (Huws, 2014, p.93).

From this reconstruction of Marx's thought one can see that the category of what produces value in capitalist society is potentially much wider. It exceeds activities such as transportation that Marx singles out for special treatment. To drive this home, we might play upon the dual meaning of the verb to move. One can move goods in a spatial sense, as in transportation, but one can move people in an emotional one. I speak of a specific sense of movement – to move people, to stimulate emotion, identification, loyalty, desire and want towards some product or brand. This marks the truly valorizing force not just in the sphere of circulation but within the entire stretch of the circuit of capital as a whole. This applies just as much to the acquisition of means of production and raw materials by businesses as it does to the acquisition of consumer goods by individuals.

It is not enough for a product to be made and used. It is then only a use-value, a product of labour. It must sell and to sell must warrant desire. It is the latter that gives it value, that validates it as something worth exchanging. Orthodox presentations see intrinsic value given osmosis-like to the object. But what is important here is the generation of meaning, desirability, significance around it. It is this that 'creates' the commodity, if we consider the commodity to be that which is sold, and the mere product of labour only a potential commodity. The labour of circulation, in creative industries and elsewhere, stimulates meaning, desire and attachment. This provokes the validation of something as worthy of exchange and grants the attendant status of a commodity. As pointed out in Chapter 1, this differs from a marginalist account of

value by situating these processes under coercive and antagonistic conditions, of human creation beyond our control and not of our choosing.

7.7. The Creative Industries in the Circuit of Capital

In sum, productiveness is situated in the trajectory of the commodity rather than in the activity of labour. In *Theories of Surplus Value* (1861-63) Marx states that 'it is not th[e] concrete character of labour' that 'stamps it as productive labour in the system of capitalist production'. Rather 'only labour which manifests itself in commodities' is properly productive capitalist labour. The emphasis here is upon the production of a commodity as the arbiter of productiveness. Concrete labour, therefore, has little to do with productiveness. In fact, it is the stamping of this labour as productive that counts. And the necessary condition of this is the production of a commodity that someone has some use for. This in turn is the necessary condition of whatever this product of labour is – a good or service – becoming an object of exchange- a formal commodity- in the first place. The condition is that it sells, garners value, bringing its labour into a social relationship of abstraction with other such labours. It thus 'stamps' that labour as part of the productive labour of society.

As concerns the first, I have applied a value-form perspective to the question of productiveness. This approach stresses an explanation of the origins of value in the social validation of abstract labour in exchange. It entails a crucial shift of emphasis which conceives of the criterion of productiveness as one determined by the law of value rather than determining of it. Through this, I have suggested that the productiveness of a given labour process is an unknown quantity until capital attains the vantage point of the sale of a commodity. We can strip away the practices and procedures that mark the gradual unfolding of the exchange abstraction both within the realm of production and without. Aside from these, value boils down to an encounter forged within the moment of exchange. Thus, the productiveness that gives rise to this value is grasped in retrospect. Indeed, the possibility of the labour that went into the production of this value even being 'productive' comes with the arrival of this value in its fullest form. This form is the outcome of a transaction of two commodities by buyer and seller by means of the mediation of money.

Value is a social relation rather than something intrinsic to labour and its product. The latter is not by some miracle endowed with a valuable quality by the former. No labour is productive or unproductive in its very doing. The ultimate judgement of this comes with the success or failure to sell or exchange the particular commodity that it renders. Previously an ideal category, the production of value is conjured. It has no practical or concrete basis other than in the abstraction of exchange. In this respect, it functions as a conceptual framework through which to assess past concrete activity. Within production itself, tools of abstraction attain early glimpses of this eventuality. But, in the final instance, production is a category not of the realm of production but of the sphere of circulation.

In creating the conditions whereby value can be 'realized', creative industries create the conditions upon which it can be said to be 'produced' at all. They intervene directly in the possibility of the category of productiveness itself. They assist in its attachment to the labour that has generated a given good or service. They do this by intervening in the meanings and images under which goods and services are packaged in order to craft saleable commodities out of the simple products of labour. They attach to pre-existing use-values another layer of significance which styles them in such a way to attract the desire and wants of consumers. They create new use-values by creating new needs where neither were present before. Without this, there is a lessened likelihood of exchange, and without exchange, the impossibility of value. In this respect, creative industries are as crucial rather than peripheral to capitalist

valorization, the effects of which on creative agencies we will discuss concretely in the next chapter.

7.8. Conclusion

Having situated the creative industries within the framework of the circuit of capital and the production of value, I agree with postoperaist accounts that the categories of production and realisation need rethinking in the context of new spheres of economic activity like the creative industries. But I do not think that this is so because of new conditions that have only recently come into focus. Rather, creative industries bring to light something that has always been present within the fibre of the value-form. On this basis, my objection to Fumagalli's approach is threefold.

First I object to the idea that branding and so on *adds* value. Fumagalli is right to move the emphasis of valorisation to realisation. But the role of creative industries is far more fundamental. It makes value possible. Fumagalli can only hold to such a view by retaining a traditionalist labour theory of value that he otherwise paints as redundant. For Fumagalli, one of the 'main novelties of the new accumulation and valorization paradigm' is that 'knowledge and culture diffusion [...] become productive'. They are *directly* productive of value. In this, Fumagalli holds to a traditional understanding of Marx's 'labour' theory of value. He conceptualises 'productive labour' in a materialist way. Hence: 'productive labour is that which lends its labour to the production of commodities and tangible merchandise which have an exchange value'. In contrast, non-productive labour is that which physically contributes to no value-bearing commodity. Thus, emphasis falls not upon the fulfilment of this value in and through exchange, but takes the conventional path of seeing value as something *added* via labour. Unproductive labour is that which 'adds no value to anything' (Fumagalli and Morini, 2013, p.5). As we have seen, my analysis surpasses this understanding of so-called 'knowledge work' such as that which takes place in the creative industries. I move away from a productivist appreciation of value to one oriented in circulation, but, as we will see in the next three chapters, one that sees the influence of market-mediated exchange relations pass over into the content and measure of concrete labour through the imposition of external standards.

Second, I object to the idea that any aspect of the symbolic imaginary and the importance of consumption to the possibility of value is new or novel. I see these aspects, and their expression in the working of the creative industries, as completely indispensable to the possibility of value itself. They are significant not only in specific or contemporary instances. Unlike Fumagalli, I do not assume the increasing relevance of advertising and graphic design. Rather, I point to the centrality of these activities for commodity exchange itself, at any time and in any place. Their role, even when under other industrial categories, is indispensable for capitalist valorization. I make no claim of novelty. Statistics testify to the difficulties of approach oriented around the contemporariness of advertising's pre-eminence. Figures from Douglas Galbi's Coen Structured Advertising Expenditure Dataset (see Galbi 2008) show that, between 1919 and 2008, advertising expenditure remained constant at around 2% of total GDP, with the peak years between 1920 and 1932. The statistical insignificance of any changes in the trajectory of advertising spend in the last 100 years does not tell the whole story. As Baran and Sweezy note (2013), it is difficult to accurately capture the industrial activity and resources pumped into each advertisement. The figures represent only the amount spent on advertisements themselves. For instance, the effort getting adverts placed in media and television outlets. But they may not quite convey 'the costs of market research, designing for advertising purposes, and the like carried on *within* the producing or selling concerns themselves'. As Baran and Sweezy assert, for these, 'reliable estimates [...] are not available'. It is these types of activity that I am concerned with here. I am less concerned with the buying and

selling of advertising space. This constitutes only the most final and obvious expression of a much longer and more complex process of creative work. These concerns aside, the statistics do provide food for thought to those who would suggest that the relationship between advertising and capitalism is anything new. What the statistics show is that it has been there from early on, and remains much the same. As such, there can be no novelty attached to the current state of things.

Third, and as covered extensively in the previous chapter, I object to the conceptualisation of 'immaterial labour' as an immeasurable cooperative pursuit. I refute the impossibility of capture by both traditional capitalist valorisation processes and Marx's theory of value. Measure manifests fully only with valorisation itself, which is to say in the moment of commodity exchange, the moment of realisation. Of course, measure arises in an anticipatory form within the realm of production. But value brings into existence its own measure by appearing in monetary form upon the successful exchange of commodities. As such, value's measure does not and has never referred to any expenditure of concrete labour. It refers to labour in the abstract. As Heinrich writes, critiquing the postoperaist attachment to Marx's Fragment that we surveyed in Chapter 5, 'labour in the immediate form' is [...] not the source of wealth. The social substance of wealth or value in capitalism is abstract labor, whereby it does not matter whether this abstract labor can be traced back to labor-power expended in the process of production' (Heinrich 2013a, p.17). As such, there is no reason why capitalist measurement cannot function as it did before. The supposedly immeasurable cooperative productiveness of immaterial labour would be measured in the same way as all other labour. This is through its abstract expression as monetary value. This measure need not reflect any specific concrete activity in the first instance. As Heinrich writes elsewhere, '*[i]mmmediate* labour-time was at any rate never the measure of value' (2013b, 208). Indeed, the case study in Chapters 9 and 10 suggests measure is often completely uprooted from it

As such, no crisis of measurability afflicts the creative industries in contemporary capitalism, as Fumagalli would suggest. Rather, the conditions described amount to a 'crisis' so permanent as to be no crisis at all. We can still use the categories provided by Marx. Indeed, creative industries illuminate those categories more clearly than industries traditionally scrutinised by Marxists. This chapter is a contribution towards escaping the immaterial labour thesis. It undoes its dominance over discussions of creative industries and other contemporary forms of economic activity. Postoperaismo carries a burden of precisely the same productivist baggage from which it purports to unshackle itself. An account of value informed by Heinrich's new reading suggests that postoperaist claims to have overthrown value theory go nowhere near far enough, and shed little light on what really goes on with work in creative industries like graphic design, branding and advertising.

The next chapter looks more deeply into how creative industries are situated within the wider context of commodity exchange and capitalist valorisation with reference to the empirical case study through which I will illustrate and support the arguments made so far in the first half of this thesis. Chapter 8 will be followed by two further empirical chapters exploring the persistence of measurability in the creative industries, leading into conclusion in which I will reflect on how the findings generated help us strip away the postoperaist celebration of immaterial labour's spontaneous and immeasurable productiveness to unpick the character of creative work in capitalist society and the continuing relevancy of measurement in this crucial sector.

8. CREATIVITY IN CONTEXT: SECTORAL, NATIONAL, CORPORATE

8.1. Introduction

The rise of creative industries like graphic design, branding and advertising, which help circulate commodities around society, and fulfil optimally the characteristics of immaterial labour, is for Lazzarato (1996) enabled by the importance of immaterial needs in post-Fordist economies, satisfied not by the basic material elements but by services, goods and the status and 'lifestyles' attached to them. Lazzarato suggests that the primary outcome of successful immaterial labour is the production of a relationship in which the commodity is 'not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the "ideological" and cultural environment of the consumer'. This social effect 'makes immediately apparent something that material production had "hidden," namely, that labor produces not only commodities, but first and foremost it produces the capital relation.'

Chapter 7 unpicked some of the assumptions undergirding this presentation of how creative industries and creative labour relate to the circulation of commodities. Moving onto the empirical case study of a number of agencies operating in the sector, in this chapter I will explore further the impact creative industries' imbrication in the selling of goods and services as commodities has upon the specific constraints and imperatives workers undergo in the labour process at the agencies studied. This shows us that the pivotal status of creative industries is due not to the 'immaterial' character of the particular concrete labour content expended within them, as critiqued in Chapter 6, but rather its overdetermination by the market-mediated relation of value as a social-form to which this concrete content is ultimately subservient. With this relationship come certain forms of measurement, control and organisation- the practical abstractions introduced in Chapter 2- with which agencies cannot but comply, even as they find themselves in competition with their clients over issues of time and money.

Thus, in this chapter I will introduce the wider corporate context within which the agencies studied in the research sit. This has three dimensions. First, the characteristics of the graphic design, branding and advertising sectors. Second, the national differences between the British and Dutch agencies. Thirdly, the corporate context in its relationship to the different kinds of clients the agencies service. Surveying each of these aspects, I will reflect on how they impact upon the work conditions and processes investigated in the two chapters that follow. By looking at the very creative industries that make possible the circulation of the goods and services the client companies sell as commodities, we can explore how the work performed by the designers who implement their brands and communication strategies relates to a wider context of social validation and abstract economic compulsion derived from, and in service of, money-mediated exchange in the market, in line with the account of value set out in Chapter 1.

8.2. Sectoral context

The research covers a number of different kinds of agencies, divided between graphic design, branding and advertising (or 'strategic design'), although the lines between them blur in both activity and personnel. Figure 1 below gives a profile of the composition of the case study sample.

Figure 1: Breakdown of case study companies

Name	Location	Participants	Specialism(s)	Number of employees (if known)	Turnover (if known)
Company 1	UK	4	Graphic design	20	-
Company 2	UK/Netherlands	8	Brand design	350	£40m
Company 3	Netherlands	1	Strategic design	100	-
Company 4	Netherlands	4	Brand design	15	-
Company 5	UK	1	Brand design	60	£4m
Company 6	UK	1	Brand design	20	£2m
Company 7	UK	1	Strategic design	30	-
Company 8	UK	1	Graphic design	-	-
Company 9	UK	1	Graphic design	-	-
Company 10	Netherlands	1	Brand design	450	£70m
(Freelancers)	Netherlands	10	N/A	N/A	N/A

The particular sort of agency one works at can impact upon the work conditions one is subject to. Several participants suggested that advertising agencies like Company 10 and Other Firm 9, both high-turnover members of large global media conglomerates, experienced much longer working hours, more intense working schedules and a closer attention to measurement and monetary value in pursuit of profitability. Many of the ongoing contracts with big multinationals that are the preserve of the leading advertising agencies will be carried out on retainer. Whilst this confers certain advantages, encouraging flexibility and more creative freedom (Author's Interview with Designer, 26.4.M.D, 21/07/2014), there was a perception that working on retainer for ongoing clients actually intensified the rule of the billable hour and the constant imperative to measure. The retainers ad agencies were placed upon by clients produced time budgets that needed constant monitoring, because on a retainer of 200 hours, 'when you get to 200 [...] and say 'we reached 200', they'll say 'why did it get to 200, show us how' (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014). The bigger the client, the more scrupulous its accountability mechanisms, and the more intense in turn the need for the agency to account for how they have used the money they are paid.

Another factor influencing the change in work cultures between design and advertising agencies is the ownership structure. With 450 employees, Company 10 was a large subsidiary of Other Firm 7, a FTSE100-listed conglomerate comprising many smaller creative agencies subsumed through mergers and acquisitions, and with an annual revenue of some £12bn. Company 10 had a turnover of £70m- unusually for the sector, on an upwards trajectory- but, importantly, falling profit. Coupled with the pressure to provide for the shareholder interest to which the parent company, Other Firm 7, was subservient, this created a working environment characterised by intense work regimes and some poor, unhealthy conditions, as we shall see.

So-called 'independent' agencies free of umbrella ownership, on the other hand, pay closer attention to individual working conditions. One senior designer had been employed in the UK at Other Firm 5, part of Other Firm 6, a £200m-turnover group, which in turn was itself owned by Other Firm 7, a FTSE100-listed conglomerate with an annual revenue of £12bn. The shareholder structure had a 'trickle-down effect', she said, whereby 'everything is a financial asset, in terms of the processes [Other Firm 5] had in place' and 'the kind of monitoring' instituted around 'how many hours you're spending on each job' (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 9.2.F.SD, 18/03/2014). Interestingly, although the measurement was intense and Gradgrindian, it was not as 'detailed and rigorous' as what she later found to be the case at Company

2. She described the cultural differences between working under this ownership structure when compared to working for an independent agency like Company 2:

the CEO- I was always aware of the stress she was put under financially, you know, working really closely with the financial director to try and achieve the targets that were set by [Other Firm 7], and each year they'd have incremental goals, you know, depending on what you achieved the year before, you'd then have to achieve more the next year, and I think that culturally puts a lot of pressure on those people, and I think maybe certain kind of, kind of softer kind of human welfare thoughts are not as...they're not not seen as important, because I think everyone there has integrity and cares a lot, and it's got a really good culture, but I think they accept that people will work longer hours because they care about what they do, they care about the people. [But] I feel like at [Company 2] they're very good at [...] noticing what hours people are working, and if you're working long hours relatively frequently they'll ask you, you know, 'why is that happening? Is it because you need more time? Are we not booking in enough time for you? Is it because you need more support? Or are you having, is it because you're too slow', [...] whereas I think at the agency I was working for in London they would just take it for granted that you were working late, and you'd just carry on, you could work as late as you liked. [T]hey didn't monitor it in the same way that they do here.

However, it can be noted here that this care and attention owes not always to genuine concern with the health of workers, but rather because the company shoulders a greater burden from one or two poor performers than would a bigger agency availed of the security that comes with a FTSE100-listed parent company, for instance. As the senior designer said of Company 2, 'they're amazing at being very, being quite controlled and aware of all the processes, how they're doing things, and how everyone's performing individually, because if you're not performing well, you have to leave I guess, because it's a private company you can't kind of carry people'.

A beneficial side effect of this closer scrutiny is a better standard of company care and vigilance for instances of employee burnout. But, even in the context of a more employee-centred independent agency, Company 2's stated purpose, according to the annual report given in their company account, was still primarily to produce sufficient profit so as to pay dividends to shareholders. Profitability was down year-on-year but, at around £1.5 million, still, in the view of the end of year accounts, sufficient to satisfy this aim. This implies certain regimes of workplace practice that betray its auspiciously more caring, sharing ethos. Even outside the big publicly-listed agencies, the iron rule of profitability reigns supreme. This suggests the relevancy of a social form analysis such as that set out in Chapter 3, that sees the immediate form of labour, and the forms of objective economic appearance with which workers must contend, containing and implying a wider set of social relations beyond the workplace.

It can be seen from the examples above that smaller independent agencies care more about what we could broadly call 'health and beauty' than the bigger, shareholder-driven examples. They place more emphasis on caring for their 'human resources', and focus more on creating 'beautiful work'. One participant, now at a big agency, said not a lot of 'creative work' gets done there. On the other hand, small boutique agencies make 'beautiful work', but 'don't make a lot of money' (Author's Interview with Designer, 31.7.M.D, 14/01/2015).

These boutique agencies are plugged into the upwards tendency of forms of luxury consumption in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis (Moseley, 2009), the major outlet of the hoarded wealth that clogged up the coffers of the rich with no profitable route out (Kliman, 2012). Another interviewee worked for one of these small boutique agencies. He said that there was 'some degree of fallacy' in the ideal they were commonly taken to represent (Author's Interview with Designer, 32.8.M.D, 14/01/2015). One might not have to deal with supermarkets, for instance, but the

assumption on the part of those invested in the smaller boutique end of the spectrum that what they are doing stands above mere 'service provision for a client' does not stand up to scrutiny. The industries the designer was doing work for- clients in the arts and architecture- might have a better conceptual understanding of design but they still inhabit a world where there is a market-driven financial commonsense and 'language' to which the agencies that do work for them must conform. Architects are big business, doing work for big clients, among whom number 'some pretty sordid people'. The curator or the head of the firm might have some 'radical ideas' about what they want the agency to do, but, the agency still has to go through marketing and other levels of the organisation for decisions- including, crucially, the finance team. Although auspiciously more accommodating of an aesthetic edge, arts and architecture, auction houses and hotels, imbued with the status of luxury that attracts the great lumps of uninvestable capital that swell the hoarded wealth of the rich, still demand the cold, hard focus of financial good sense. In this context, the idea that 'you're doing something different to or above what is done at a commercial design agency' is a 'fallacy'. And, what's more, designers are 'paid much less', and, although seemingly possessing more creative freedom, often have less than one would elsewhere.

All of the dynamics so far discussed with reference to different kinds of agency reduce to the blunt fact that, across the piece, my research suggests that tendencies toward a tighter focus on profitability and the intensified work regimes that follow have pervaded as the agency sector both expands and becomes more internally competitive. The research took place at a time where, as one participant put it, 'the industry has expanded massively' (Author's Interview with Designer, 6.2.M.D, 19/02/2014). But with this expansion comes added pressures. Amid intensified competition, there is some evidence of declining fee income in the design sector. Moor and Julier (2009, p.9) quote figures which show a long-term decrease in fee income, despite a steady level of designers and design firms over the same period. These figures suggest that, whilst design firms are becoming more productive due to greater efficiency, quicker turnaround and technological advances, the benefit of this increasing productivity is being passed on to clients rather than felt directly by the companies themselves. As the clients seek to claw what they can from the process, agencies lose out. There was general consensus that, post-recession, clients were more constrained what they could spend, but expected the same level of service, so that agencies 'end up trying to deliver the same quality of work as people have been doing for the last twenty years', but, owing to the client having less cash to spend, trying to match this standard 'in a much shorter time', said one designer. Companies were merely trying to 'keep up appearances' in any way they could, without the monetary means to do so (Author's Interview with Designer, 6.2.M.D, 19/02/2014). As we shall see in the next chapter, this places clients and agencies in competition for what little they can extract from their exchange, with a corresponding impact on how work is measured and controlled, as examined in detail in the next two chapters.

As budgetary constraints take hold, agencies swim in a client pool where the room to compete is reducing. This intensifies competition within the creative sector, dovetailing with a handful of other trends in its development. Participants testified to a general fragmentation in the creative industries. Big agencies break down into smaller ones. Employees break away to go independent, either as freelancers or in small enterprises with others. Other employees face redundancy, only to be hired back as freelancers by the same company that sacked them- an upmarket version of full-time staff being moved onto zero-hours contracts. There is a growing specialisation of creative tasks, facilitated by the ability to search for specific creative skills online. Specialisation has accelerated due to the informationalisation of recruitment via the internet. There are sites 'for freelancers to find work, and for clients

to put projects up' (Author's Interview with Designer, 12.10.M.D, 21/05/2014). This allows further specialisation in the sector, as clients 'can search a massive pool of freelancers and [...] find someone who can specialise in what they need' rather than recruit an agency for full-spectrum service. An expansion of the freelance sector expresses the breakdown in company size, as fixed staff decrease in favour of a constantly circulating satellite workforce that service the constellation of small firms in the sector. As a result, there's 'not many' big agencies left (Author's Interview with Designer, 21.FL.M.D, 11/07/2014). They are getting 'smaller and 'smaller'. At the same time, the highest-performance agencies become subsumed through merger and acquisition within big conglomerates, or else struggle to maintain their independence in a field where the larger firms dominate.

The sectoral economic conditions in which the agencies studied found themselves added certain stresses to how work processes and modes of organisation unfolded internally. The main company covered in the study, Company 2, had offices in the UK and Holland, over 350 employees over four sites, and an annual turnover of around £40 million and total profit of £1.5 million in 2015. Neither had advanced on previous years. Company 2's static annual turnover, the company accounts noted, owed to two factors: a competitive environment, and clients' increasingly stringent focus on procurement. Similarly, Company 5 had a 2015 turnover of £4 million, and a profit of £2 million. Both these figures were down on previous years. Company 6, with 20 employees, had a turnover of £2 million in 2015 and a profit of £1.6 million. Although 'client budgetary constraints' and economic confidence impacted turnover negatively in comparison to previous years, according to the company accounts, profit margin increased. This, the company accounts suggested, owed to the imposition of tighter control of time management internally. As we shall see in Chapters 9 and 10, the struggle to turn a profit in the context of increased competition for increasingly spendthrift clients was waged primarily on the backs of workers themselves, via an intensification of rhythm and measurement. Here the 8 'C's set out in Chapter 1 are relevant, time extracted as the measure of SNLT compelled by an external business context where the demands of commensuration and comparison become increasingly stringent.

There were wider sectoral pressures that impacted, via the money end of things, on how work was carried out and experienced, and the regimes of measurement to which it was subject. Not least among these was the economic dynamics around urban space for firms embedded in desirable creative locations like London and Amsterdam. Spiralling rents, business rates and the costs of overheads like heating and energy got the better of a few of the firms at which participants were employed. One interviewee described a Dutch company that had previously enjoyed rude health through contracts with a succession of big finance firms, with the free-flowing money facilitating a free-flowingly creative working environment. 'They've actually moved studio because they couldn't afford to heat the one they were in anymore, so I'm guessing money is a factor somewhere along the way', he told me (Author's Interview with Designer, 1.1.M.D, 15/01/2014). Company 6, a London design agency, had recently undergone redundancies, motivated by, one designer told me, 'the lease running out on the studio they were renting. They were looking for other places to rent, and realised they probably weren't going to be able to afford anywhere without making redundancies. Because obviously they'd need to be making profit for anyone to let a studio to them' (Author's Interview with Designer, 30.6.M.D, 30/11/2014). Here a wider economic and material context dovetails with the focus on profitability to intervene in the fraught relationship between the buyer and seller of labour-power. Auspiciously creative and artistic they may be, but agencies are no more 'immaterial' for it, at the mercy of the same material desperation as all else in a society where money forms the golden thread of social reproduction. Here the appearance contains

what it denies in sublation, in line with the negative dialectical method of understanding outlined in Chapter 3.

This external context relates to processes of creative clustering whereby agencies and creatives flock to desirable urban locations, initially attracted by cheap rent and a flexible, young labour force (see Hesmondhalgh, 2013, pp.170-174, Hartley et al, 2013, pp.17-20). A familiar tale follows, whereby these very movements of creatives to certain city locales results in an upturn in that area's fortunes, gentrifying it to the extent that the same individuals and businesses that made it what it was can no longer afford to stay, and seek out fertile new territory elsewhere, thus commencing the cycle anew. I problematize the mainstream presentation of this process in the Conclusion of this thesis, but for now it suffices to say that this churn places constant pressure on agencies and the people they employ, and an uncertainty around their common future. In the case of Company 6, this pressure played out very directly in the imposition of new time monitoring regimes employed to seek a margin even where the conditions for doing so were unfavourable (Author's Interview with Designer, 30.6.M.D, 30/11/2014). Without the collective political efficacy, as a corporate vested interest or at the level of labour, to command a change in the business environment in which they operate, internal mechanisms are the only means at their disposal to make the best of a bad situation.

What one participant called the search to avoid 'massive overheads' (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 4.1.M.SD, 15/01/2014) dovetails with a wider fragmentation in the sector, as independent-minded designers set off to freelance or set up their own studios. Smaller, more 'boutique' agencies endure fewer restrictions on where they can set up shop. But the proliferation of agencies, studios and freelancers creates an added burden of competition in the sector, specifically for those medium-sized firms who find themselves squeezed between the big shareholder-owned corporates and one-man-bands working with loose networks of freelancers attracting work through the web with few other overheads. The same participant explained this dynamic thus:

there's a lot of squabbling over the scraps at the very bottom, so you've got one or two man studios doing the odd bits because you know their overheads are low, they're able to hit some of these clients and also they're winning some quite good ones because they'll go to the biggest studios, who've got massive overheads, and they're like 'we're eighty pounds an hour', well, the guy down there can do it for twenty pounds an hour, and the guy down there's still making a profit because he's just in his bedroom, um, so it gets difficult [...].

As demonstrated in Figure 1 above, many of the companies covered in this study were precisely the kind of middle-range firms on the receiving end of this fragmentation. The added competitiveness produced by this tendency towards fragmentation in the sector induced agencies to sell themselves short seeking work, by pitching lower than a job will cost in order to secure projects from potential clients or overdelivering on an agreed budget at a loss to keep a client for future work. As we shall see in the next chapter, this places certain pressures on agencies and their staff at the stage of pitching and pricing. As one designer at Company 4 told me, 'I've seen friends in this industry really be put under pressure for pitches when they have forty-eight hours to turn around a really ridiculously amazing pitch and they need the work and other agencies are fighting them because they need the work and the budget becomes narrower' (Author's Interview with Designer, 26.4.M.D, 21/07/2014). The pressures at this end of the process then impinge adversely on the creative labour performed once the plan and price are set in place post-pitch. A creative director at Company 2 explained how, when the company did 'overdeliver for the client in order to get more work out of them in the future', the intensity of work and the extent

of working hours would increase, as the agency tried to do as much as they could within the remit of an insufficient budget (Author's Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014). Interestingly, this situation arises partly because of fragmentation that itself owes to freelancers breaking away from agencies precisely because of these conditions, a contradictory and destructive self-fulfilling prophecy.

One final aspect of the sectoral context that influences working practices is the imperative for smaller agencies to develop themselves as sellable propositions with reference to mergers and acquisitions with and by larger advertising and media conglomerates. One participant, a managing director, joined Company 5 with the express mission to put in place mechanisms for accountability, good governance and financial rigour so as to render the agency sellable at some future date (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014). This is the tide with which smaller agencies swim. Undergoing these attempts to render the company sellable, the workers experience this as a tightening of controls over time use and expenditure, and a closer focus on monitoring and accountability. Their labour is packaged as a part of the company as a sellable proposition in itself, abstracting the concrete as part of the whole in a social form cohered through the implementation of the measures of practical abstraction defined in Chapter 2 and explored in greater depth in the two closing chapters.

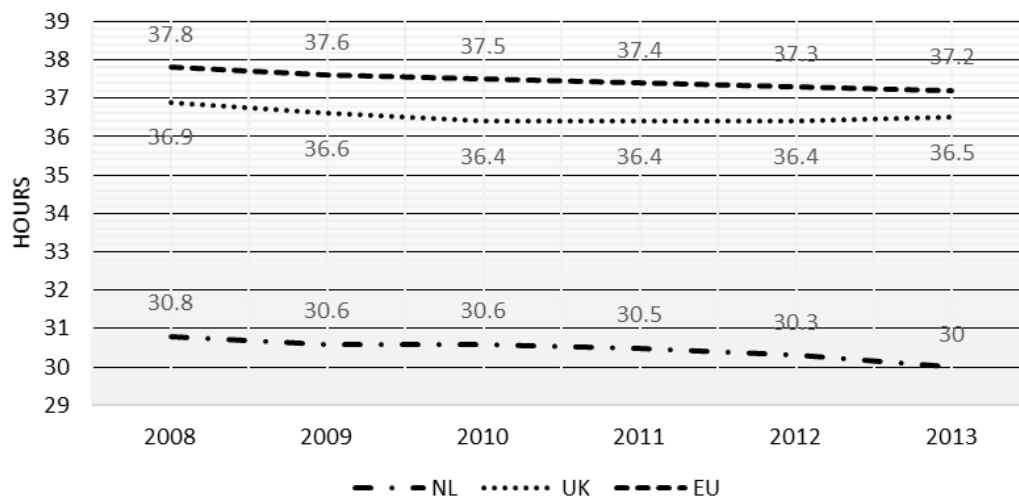
What all these examples show is that, at the sectoral level, creativity is not enough for agencies to depend on. Rather, they must endow themselves with a keen sense of the business end of things. Beautiful work must also be profitable. The contingency of the consumer markets with which agencies must work must be counterbalanced by good finances and sufficient reserves to cover dry periods. This business context directly impacted upon the way people worked in the agencies, undermining the constituent autonomy ascribed to the creative in the postoperaist accounts surveyed in Chapters 4 and 5. In the next section, I will consider how the different national circumstances in which the creatives found themselves working between the UK and the Netherlands affected the way in which work was experienced and carried out.

8.3. National context

As discussed briefly in Chapter 3, there are certain national differences in working hours between the UK and the Netherlands that make their combination in the case study a useful way to highlight what is significant about the control and measurement of labour-time in the creative industries in each instance.

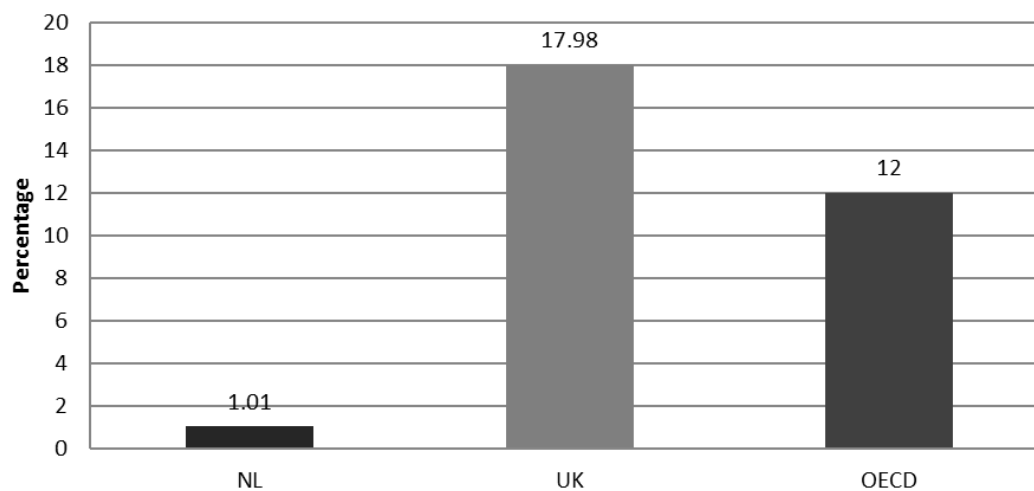
As Figures 2 and 3 below show, the UK and the Netherlands differ drastically in their working hours. In 2012, British employees spent almost 300 more hours at work than their Dutch counterparts. In Holland, the average working week in 2013 was 30 hours. In the UK it was almost a whole working day longer (36.5 hours). Whereas only 1 in 100 workers in Holland work over 50 hours a week, in the UK it is one in five. What's more, Dutch workers are far more productive with the fewer hours they work, as displayed in Figures 4 below. What this suggests is that differences in corporate culture and workplace norms between the two countries contribute different outcomes on a wider scale. Many of the agencies included in the study were based in London or Amsterdam.

Figure 2: Average number of usual weekly hours of work in main job 2008-2013

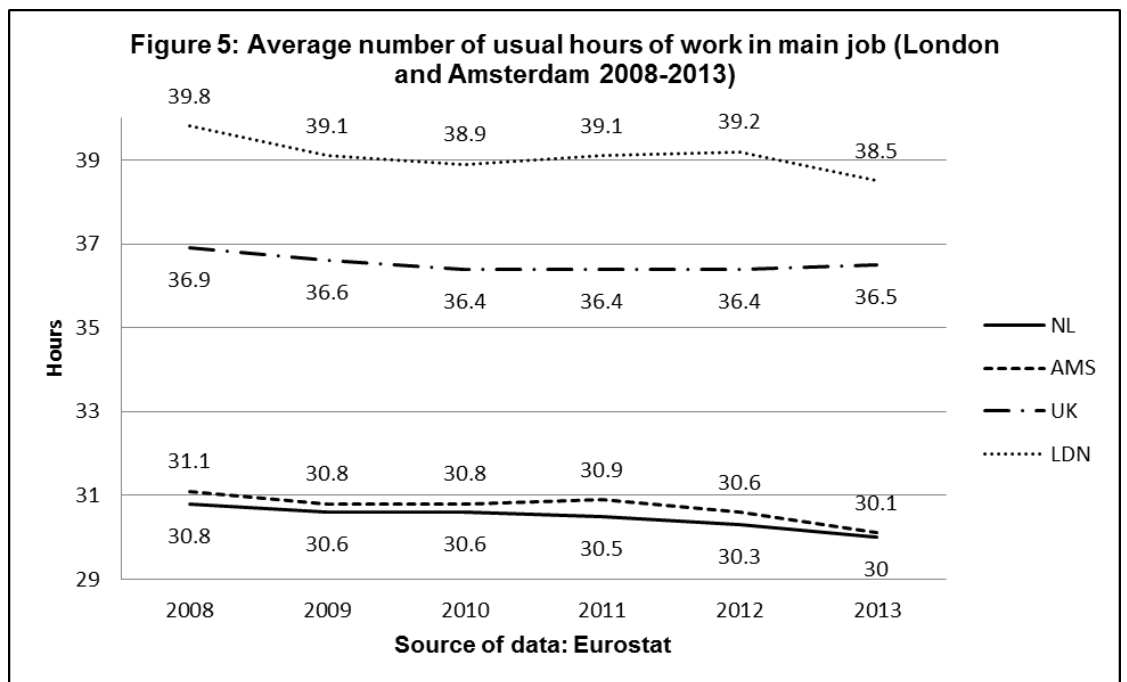
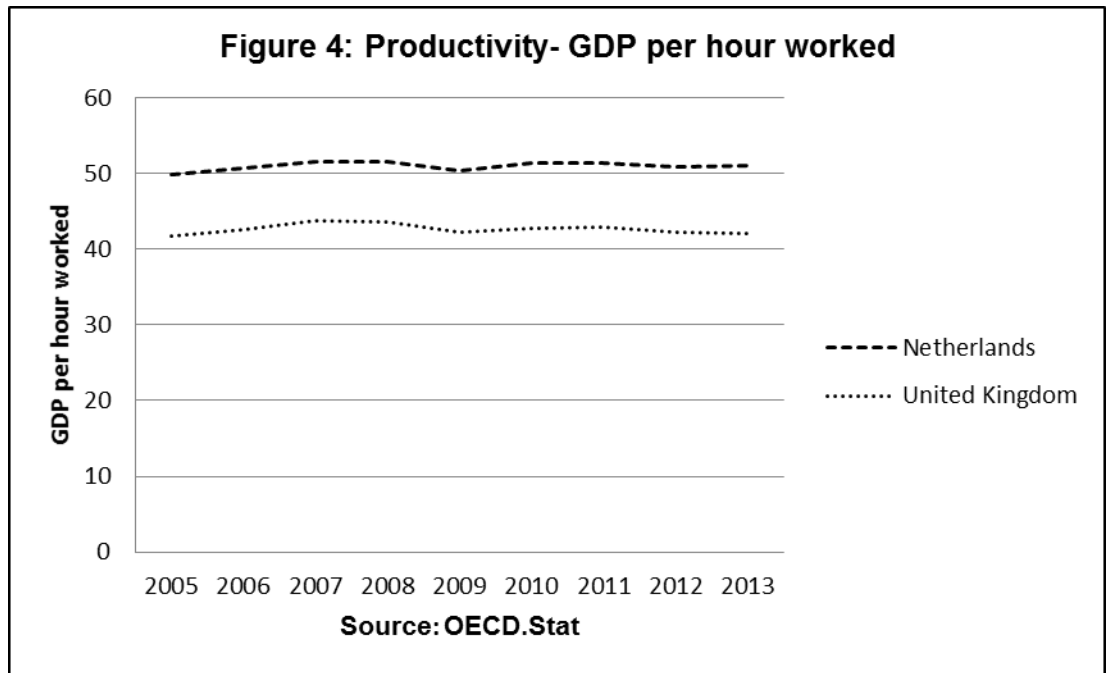


Source of data: Eurostat

Figure 3: Percentage of employed whose usual hours of work per week are 50 hours or more (2014)



Source: OECD Better Life Index



The cities themselves differ, too, mimicking the wider trends in the countries as a whole. As Figure 5 above shows, Amsterdam tends to conform to the national figures for the Netherlands. But employees in London can expect to work an extra two hours a week more than the national average. This suggests that London, specifically, has a work culture of longer hours than the UK as a whole, whereas workplaces in Amsterdam are constrained by the same standards present elsewhere in the smaller of the two countries.

What the creative industries clarify within these wider divergences is the extent to which the creative sector is a law unto itself with regard to working hours and work cultures. Although participants expressed some advantages in working for Dutch companies in terms of more relaxed and efficient work processes and shorter working

hours, what the statistics show is that actually there is a great deal of convergence between firms in the OECD category professional services (which includes creative agencies) across the UK and the Netherlands, and in both London and Amsterdam, as displayed in Figure 6 below. As such, within the patchwork of different trends and tendencies nationally, we can discern the constitution of a distinct set of characteristics shared by firms in creative industries like design, branding and advertising. By situating our case studies within the context of divergent national work time regimes, in two countries with, as Figure 7 displays, a similar concentration of creative industry employment relative to their size, what is distinctive about the creative industries can be highlighted.

In this section, I will account for some of the national differences that impact upon the processes of measurement and work conditions found in the various agencies studied. I will also account for the convergence between the agencies in the UK and Netherlands with a brief overview of the role of 'expat' agencies, of which many of the Dutch firms I investigated are examples, that import a young UK labour force from London agencies, who bring with them an expectation of long-hours working and intense work regimes that then take root in the Amsterdam agencies, gradually replacing the more laid-back ethos with which the latter are associated by the very designers who, seeking a change of setting, find themselves attracted to what they see as the Dutch way of working.

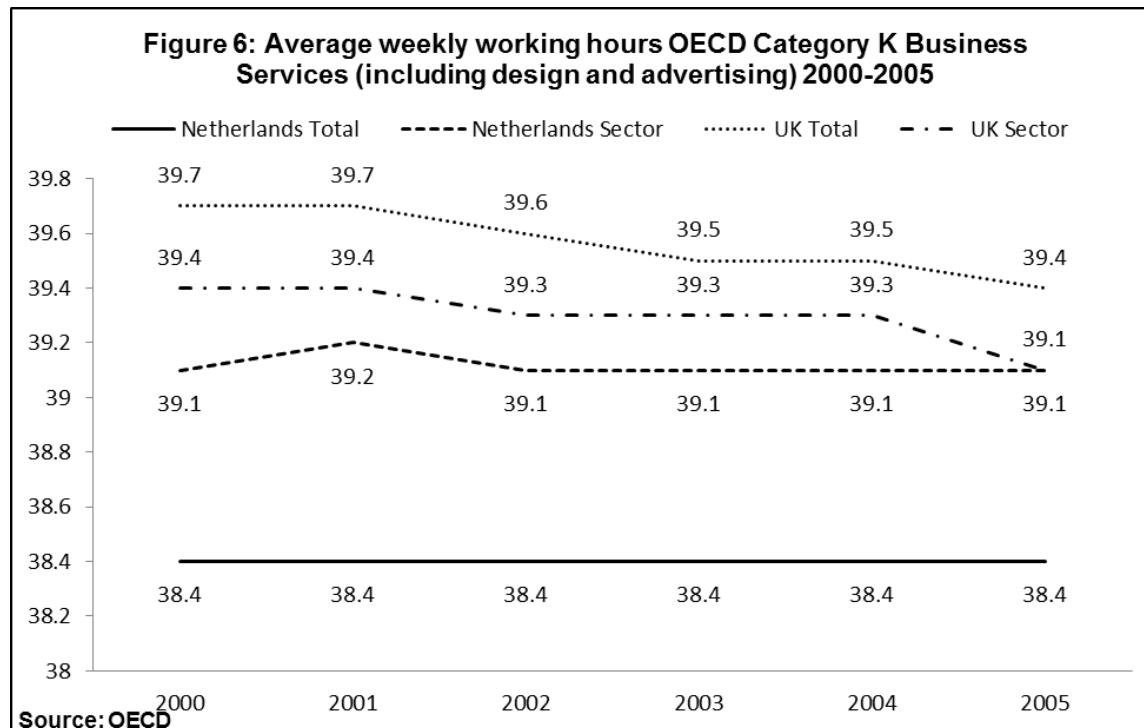


Figure 7: Creative industries employment as percentage of total

Country	2011	2012	2013	Average
UK	7.17	7.65	7.91	7.58
Netherlands	7.33	7.49	7.68	7.50
France	5.69	5.62	5.62	5.64
Germany	5.69	5.72	5.76	5.72
Poland	3.47	3.66	3.73	3.62
Sweden	8.83	8.97	8.88	8.89
EU-28	5.10	5.23	5.31	5.21

Source: Nathan, Pratt and Rincon-Aznar 2015

The general impression presented by participants who had worked at both UK and Dutch agencies were that the latter were more organised and thus more relaxed and with far less variance in the extent of working hours over any given period of time (Author's interviews with Designer, 6.2.M.D, 19/02/2014 and Senior Designer, 9.2.F.SD, 18/03/2014). Interestingly, however, whilst this guaranteed a better work-life balance for designers and other staff, the maintenance of this oversight over working hours depended upon a much closer attention to, firstly, estimation of how long a job will take, and, secondly, the monitoring of working hours expended on the job, with an attendant impact on regimes of measurement. The perceived efficiency that circumscribed the working day for designers employed at agencies like Company 2 chimed with a prevailing corporate culture that preserved a traditional approach to work time unfamiliar to those used to the cut-and-thrust of UK industry. For instance, one participant gave the example of Dutch heritage brand where the shutters come down at half five every evening, and there is a compulsory hour's lunch break at one o'clock (Author's Interview with Designer, 12.10.M.D, 21/05/2014).

Where this ethos was infringed, it came from outside influence, and it is to this that we can attribute the statistical convergence discussed above between work time regimes across the two very different contexts of the UK and the Netherlands. On one hand, agencies in Amsterdam like Company 2 or Company 10 endured a certain subsidiarity with reference to parent companies in London. The aforementioned participant explained that, because Company 10 is 'an offshoot, there's a lot of pressure for the really senior people there to deliver' against the shareholder objective set by their superiors in London.

But more significant still as a countervailing force to the Dutch work culture was the importing of more exhaustive time regimes on the backs of an international labour force sourced from the UK with a stronger willingness and propensity to work long hours in intense environments like those in which they once worked in London. Of the sample, a number of participants fitted this description. Six had moved from the UK to work in the Netherlands. But their situation says as much about the sector as a whole as it does about them individually. Their stories highlight destructive dynamics that undergird the popular appearance of Amsterdam as a hub of creative fulfilment.

Amsterdam creative studios are known by some as 'expat agencies' (Author's Interview with Strategist, 13.FL.M.S, 05/06/2014) because they rely on a young international workforce which arrives in the Netherlands but has no established social or family networks, well accustomed to the intense working schedules of cities like London and ready to be totally immersed in work. Dutch creatives prioritise work-life balance and family time, so young foreign creatives offer agencies the possibility to extend and intensify work patterns. As one participant explained, whereas 'the Dutch have got it much better in terms of work-life balance, younger graphic designers [...] brought over specifically to work at agencies are being abused' (Author's Interview with Designer, 12.10.M.D, 21/05/2014). The 'expat agencies' recruit and exploit young, mobile foreign workers. They extract from them long hours and intense effort to compensate for the much healthier work-life balance enjoyed by Dutch nationals. The young employees' creative commitment, familiarity with long working hours, and lack of social and family ties make them ideal employees. They support the enviable creative lifestyles of older colleagues in a city where many people pride themselves on prioritising life over work.

The UK migrant creative workforce also fills in the gaps opened by the fragmentation of the creative workforce, as designers previously employed on standard contracts break away to go freelance. Dutch agencies are therefore motivated to recruit from an outside labour force owing to some of the sectoral tendencies discussed in the first section of this chapter. The Netherlands provides a particularly favourable

environment for designers on formal contracts to break away and go freelance, with a generous and supportive tax and benefits system for freelancers (Author's Interview with Strategist, 8.3.F.S, 26/02/2014). As such, bringing in UK workers responds not to a generalised shortage of creative labour, one middleweight designer with experience of moving from the UK to the Netherlands told me, but rather the nomadic character of the Dutch creative labour force. He explained that he thought 'there are enough Dutch designers, but I don't think they work in agencies. They're kind of free agents. When you think of Dutch design, [...] you don't aspire to a Dutch design agency you aspire to a Dutch designer. And they're all basically freelance, artists who have found a way to make their work commercial' (Author's Interview with Middleweight Designer, 29.2.M.MD, 30/11/2014). It was much easier to live this lifestyle in the Netherlands than in the UK, where recent evidence suggests self-employment, rather than an idyll of comparative freedom, functions as just another form of low-paid exploitation, with little state provision to support it otherwise (Conaty, Bird and Ross, 2016, pp.11-27).

In light of these tendencies, the expat agencies witness some striking phenomena with reference to work conditions. Commuting by a leisurely cycle rather than a torrid tube ride, young British creatives discover a much different work culture in Amsterdam. But they witness the benefits of shorter hours and better quality of life at a distance. They find a country where people work thirty-hour weeks. Nobody works the forty- or fifty-hour weeks seen in London. Nine-to-five structures remain intact, rather than the variable workday many contemporary jobs entail. People prioritise family and quality of life over endless drudgery. But the young creatives find these opportunities hard to take advantage of, experiencing them vicariously. Spurred on by the intrinsic motivation of their jobs, and their sense of creative identity, they work long hours. They exhaust themselves physically and mentally. And they find their creativity limited and restricted by organisational pressures I will probe in more detail in the next two chapters.

Leaving the long-hours culture of London, young creatives crave the shorter working hours enjoyed by Dutch nationals. But although the working cultures are different, they find little change in their individual circumstances. Free of ties, used to long hours and eager to impress, 'buitenlanders' (Dutch for 'foreigners') are exploited in the name of a healthier work culture they cannot access. As one interviewee, a creative director, explained, 'there's a lot of internationals in our studio who are brought over to fill the senior gaps because the senior Dutch people don't want to work five days a week' (Author's Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014). Dutch employees 'want four days or they want to leave on time.' So, the companies 'employ internationals because they're willing to work the longer hours, because their mentality and cultural references are very different to the references here.' For the internationals, the interviewee suggests, 'working hard is a positive'. But for Dutch nationals it is 'I'm disrupted from my family life, so I'm not doing that.'

The lack of social ties forms a vicious circle. Having no friends or family in Amsterdam induces internationals to work longer hours. Then, because they are working long hours, they have no chance to establish new social ties. As one participant explained, 'younger graphic designers, quite a few of them single, are brought over here specifically' by the company for which he works. The interviewee suggested that 'they're being slightly abused in a way, they're being brought over and their social and family circles are really small, so they're doing crazy hours consistently and their social circle just becomes people at the workplace' (Author's Interview with Designer, 12.10.M.D, 21/05/2014). He suffered from this cycle. He moved out to Amsterdam with his partner. It was the first time they had lived together, and he 'wasn't really prepared for every night to be coming home to her at half ten, eleven o'clock.' More

senior members of staff tend to be Dutch nationals or long-term residents. As a middleweight designer who had moved from the UK the Netherlands noted, 'people in admin, people in higher capacity, studio management, getting people's time, etc. and the MD, were Dutch', and tended to seek work arrangements in tune with the norm of four-day weeks and the prioritisation of family and quality of life ((Author's Interview with Middleweight Designer, 29.2.M.MD, 30/11/2014).

But the undertow of this more attractive idyll is that the punishing routines of young creatives from overseas support their attractive work-life balance. In so-called 'expat agencies', junior creatives find themselves on the receiving end of this inequity, reporting long hours and intense schedules. And, self-fulfillingly, what a participant called the 'mental and physical exhaustion' to which expat designers are subject (Author's Interview with Designer, 12.10.M.D, 21/05/2014), contributes towards the same churn of new staff that make it necessary to have a constant supply of new creative labour from the UK and elsewhere in the first place. 'Basically they exhaust creatively everyone there', the designer said of Company 10.

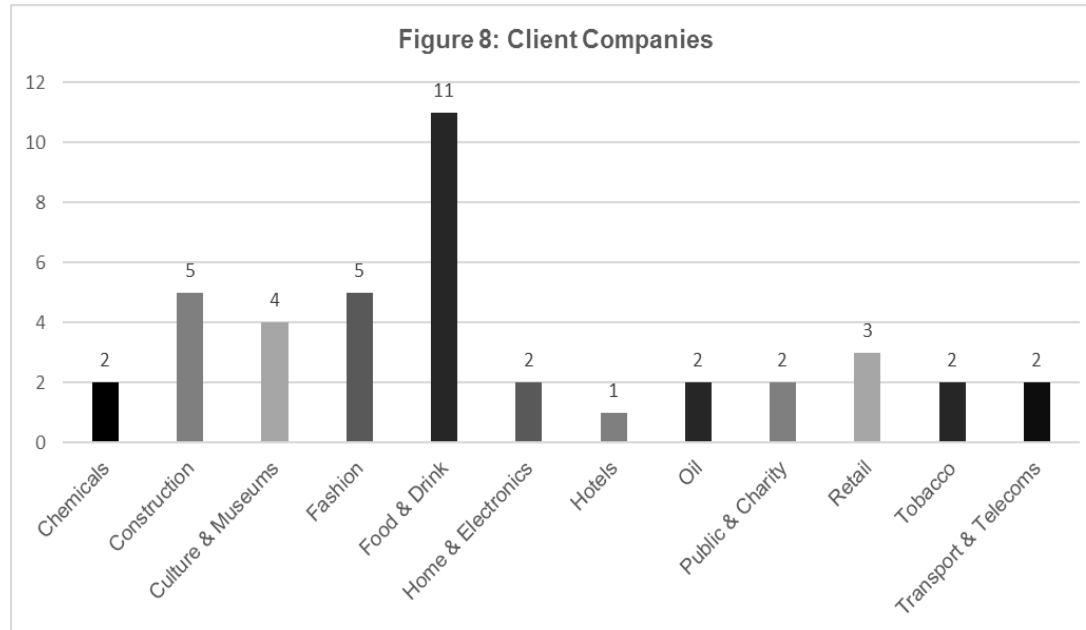
Highlighting the fact that this purportedly 'immaterial labour' consists of concrete material acts that take place in time and space with all that entails, this particular participant had endured a specifically negative experience of the exhaustion of expat labour, coming to physical harm. The designer took two months off after sustaining a repetitive strain injury following a series of long days. He describes a weekend where he worked 'about ten hours on Sunday and then we were in on Monday and we did a nineteen, twenty-hour day. So we did thirty hours, or just under. And then Tuesday morning I remember just going in and it felt like my arm was hanging off.' He eventually returned to work but found that the exhausting and exploitative work culture had not changed. He left and began freelancing, striking a far better work-life balance- and re-entering the same labour market ecology of which he had bore the brunt, albeit at a different and potentially more advantageous point of the cycle from that at which he had earlier jumped off. Hence, from the most general scale- of international differences in work organisation- we can derive insights around the most everyday aspects of life and work for those employed in creative industries.

8.4. Corporate context

The previous section introduced the specificities of the national context in which agencies are situated and how this impacts upon the way creative labour is experienced and expended. In this section, I will account for how the wider corporate context impacts upon the way agencies do business and organise production. Whereas the sectoral context covered previously discussed the dynamics of industry within the fields of graphic design, branding and advertising, here we consider how the business environment in sectors outside agencies pass over into the agencies themselves via the clients they service. Clients bring with them certain expectations and ways of working and measuring that are then transferred, by rote, to agencies and those who work for them. The work that takes place in agencies cannot, therefore, be treated in isolation from its relevance within the market more broadly. Indeed, as set out in Chapter 7, what postoperaists see as the autonomous creativity of immaterial labour cannot be conceptualised in isolation from its imbrication in the socially-mediated forms and categories of monetary exchange and commodity circulation. Clients are the medium for the introduction of these imperatives, which in turn both reconstruct and constrain creative labour to match their modes of measure.

As Figure 8 below shows, the clients with which the case study companies worked (based upon those mentioned by the participants I interviewed) cut across many sectors, but are concentrated specifically in food and drink retail, or what is termed in the industry 'Fast Moving Consumer Goods' (FMCG). Among the clients numbered

some of world's biggest multinationals, and within them, some of the world's leading brands. Although anonymised, the figures testify to the market-leading profile of the clients covered by virtue of their relationship with the case study firms featured in this study. Different agencies carved a niche working with different kinds of client. And, with different kinds of clients, came different ways and modes of working, often structured through the agency's fidelity to standards, expectations and rhythms set in play by the client.



The relationship with the client, and the impact of the client on the way in which work was carried out internally, is mediated by a crucial part of the agency organisational structure: client services. Indeed, the first point in the creative process is not the designer or creative director, but rather client services, otherwise known as the account management team. It is the latter, chiefly comprising account handlers, that initially meets with the client and finds out more about their business and what they are looking for. The results of this meeting are channelled into a creative brief document formally approved by the client as a 'quasi-legal agreement' certifying the scope and expectations of the project (Dorland, 2009, pp.108-112).

From the beginning, they act as a vector for the client's perspective within the agency, and, as one participant put it 'make it tangible' and 'feasible' for the designers to implement (Author's Interview with Account Handler, 5.2.M.CS, 19/02/2014). This is continuous, in that there is a 'constant back and forth' incorporating client feedback and corresponding changes and corrections, and also the close monitoring that the client is getting what they pay for. As one designer told me, 'the data we log goes to the head of client services' (Author's Interview with Designer, 6.2.M.D, 19/02/2014). Although the day-to-day chasing up of timesheets will be performed by someone else, the results are surveyed by those closest to the client.

Over all this, the client services team must channel competing desires from not one, but potentially many, client organisations, each themselves differentiated and complex internally, and the communicate what can sometimes be conflicting advice to creative directors and their designers. An account handler said this often leads to them becoming subsumed within the internal politics of competing factions in the client company (Author's Interview with Account Handler, 28.2.F.CS, 30/11/2014). Going native in such a way places client services personnel in an antagonistic relationship with their colleagues, whereby they have to argue the client's point of

view against the desire to be creative expressed by the designers on the shopfloor, often resulting in an outcome ‘that nobody’s really proud of.’

Against this context, they link the corporate and the creative, a conveyor belt for the import of ways of working and of measuring from other fields of business into the creative industries in conforming with the 8 ‘C’s of SNLT set out in Chapter 1, and the practical abstractions that guarantee them, as set out in Chapter 2. The manner in which they convey these customs varies depending on the specific client. As a member of the client services team at Company 2 suggested, ‘because each client is different you’ve got to approach them differently and you’ve got to interact with them differently aswell. [E]ach project is always unique so there are always differences, variations of each step’ (Author’s Interview with Account Handler, 5.2.M.CS, 19/02/2014). In the following, I will use different kinds of clients as exemplars of certain trends in the economic at large which then impact upon the working conditions explored in the next two chapters.

8.5. Public sector: Accountability

Surveying the range of different corporate areas covered by the case study companies featured in the research, we can gain a sense of the broad sweep of their engagement with the wider capitalist economy, and the different workplace conditions this engagement by extension implies. Company 1, for instance worked predominantly with the public sector or clients in construction. With public sector jobs, a pressure is placed on the agency to conform to what one designer called ‘design by committee’ whereby work has to be approved by a hierarchy. This has two impacts at the agency end: a tighter approach to accountability, to satisfy the public sector’s own stringent approach to so-called ‘best practice; and a frustrating difficulty in building consensus around one design route, and thereafter the risk that for every fourteen people that have to approve it on the client end, it will come back to the designer requiring fourteen changes (Author’s Interview with Designer, 1.1.M.D, 15/01/2014).

These features extend from the public sector to the private, of course. Not only are many large and complex organisations present among the client base of the companies in this study, with all the contingencies attending them, but, as Moor and Julier assert (2009), the same concerns with accountability have found their way from the public sector into the private in an age of corporate social responsibility and economic crisis. This was affirmed by a senior designer at Company 2, who suggested that the major change undergone by the sector in the wake of the economic crisis had been the ‘transparency that comes from the internet, access to information’, in light of which ‘people are having to be really accountable’ (Author’s Interview with Senior Designer, 9.2.F.SD, 18/03/2014). The production and operations manager at Company 4 gave a specific example of how these tendencies manifested at two clients she worked with in the fashion sector, which fell under umbrella firms with overarching accounts. Client 26 is an international fashion brand with a \$30bn annual revenue, and Client 27 a similar outfit, with a \$1bn annual revenue. She said that, as of recent years, ‘there’s a lot more protocol and policy in place’ around procurement, which demands from the agency ‘a lot of transparency, for instance about where the hours are going’, right down to an itemised representation of who is performing which micro-task when (Author’s Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 23.4.F.PO, 21/07/2014). Thus pressures towards greater measurement in one part of the economy pass over into another. Where money goes, the practical abstractions that make its measure possible follow. This highlights the limitations of a one-sided focus on the immediate forms of labour alone, as critiqued in Chapters 5 and 6.

8.6. Construction: Justification

Where Company 1 worked with construction firms, like Client 6, a FTSE 250-listed company with a £3bn annual revenue, new challenges and impositions arose. These firms tended to be on the smaller side, by virtue of the localised nature of their activity. Crucially, unlike the public sector and the big brand multinationals discussed elsewhere, they lack their own in-house teams committed to, say, brand management or marketing, with which agencies typically work when contracted by clients in other industrial fields. This means that they have a weaker grasp of the exact nature of the service they are paying for. Agencies find it difficult to convince clients ensconced in bricks and mortar to invest in something as ephemeral as a concept. Two interviewees at Company 1 raised this issue. Their construction clients did not see design as something bearing value, only the 'doing' of it- the physical point and click, print or paint, that produced the end result. Agencies, rather than seek to objectify the value-bearing service performed by creative labour in the end product, instead have to justify their existence to these 'almost comically misunderstanding' clients (Author's Interview with Designer, 1.1.M.D, 15/01/2014) by leaning heavily on the objectivity of the billed hour as the unit of concrete 'work' in the sense the managing director of a construction firm would conceive of it. Here the role of time as an abstract measure extracted from the heterogeneity of concrete labour is clear, rendering it comparable and commensurable for the purposes of outside justification, as touched upon in the presentation of the 8 'C's in Chapter 2.

8.7. Fast Moving Consumer Goods: Contingency

Company 2, meanwhile worked predominantly designed packaging for FMCG brands. They had dedicated teams responsible for working with different clusters within these fields, usually based around a conglomerate within which a set of smaller client firms fitted like the innards of a Russian doll. The roll-call of their clients is an impressive cross-section of many of the world's biggest food and drink brands. Clients 32 and 35 form part of a conglomerate with an annual revenue of €50bn. Clients 33 and 34 form part of a FTSE 100-listed food and drink conglomerate with an annual revenue of £10bn. These relationships bear significant dividends. As one participant employed at another agency observed, Company 2 is 'one of the top five design firms in the country by turnover, they make shitloads of money. Huge brands, with huge budgets, and it's FMCG- so companies are willing to throw money at that sort of stuff' (Author's Interview with Designer, 30.6.M.D, 30/11/2014).

Working with FMCG places Company 2 at the coalface of the circulation of many everyday basics- 'supermarket shelf stuff' like 'margarine, spreads, toilet paper- that kind of stuff' (Author's Interview with Middleweight Designer, 29.2.M.MD, 30/11/2014). The emphasis often falls on making small changes to packaging in order to bolster the appeal of an existing product, or design new packaging to introduce a new one- say, a chocolate bar or brand of crisps. And, because these conglomerates frequently subsume other smaller brands through merger and acquisitions, this brings a constant flow of new products into the remit of Company 2's design team.

Intervening in the processes by which everyday staples of food and self-care find their way into the homes of consumers, Company 2 sit at the precipice of the contradictory and crisis-ridden relationship whereby constraints are placed on the capacity of consumers to buy the things they need by the necessary limited nature of the wage (see Heinrich 2012). Thus the antagonistic social relations of production discussed in Chapter 3 creep back in, sublated in the commodity form itself, a contradiction central to capital to which market uncertainty itself is inextricably linked.

This renders the work they complete subject to all the contingencies this implies in a results-based game. Last-minute changes, or a sudden shift in deadline exhibits a

rhythm developed in response to the always-contingent vagaries of capitalist valorisation that infringes the creative rhythms of the designer and creative director. These corporate rhythms form around the cut-throat realities of business, hierarchy and complex, dispersed multinational companies. This is exemplified, for one participant, in a situation whereby a company's European-wide group sacked the CEO of its Dutch arm for not making enough money. The participant went back to the drawing board. But then the whole top layer of the company in the Netherlands was made redundant (Author's Interview with Designer, 14.FL.M.CD, 05/06/2014). Things stop and go on the pivot point of profit and market power. But the designer cannot switch their creativity on at will, not to mention suspend their life and other work in light of new market information. The rhythm of business, of the market, clashes with that of creative work. What this shows is that the perspectives of designer, agency and client are necessarily partial. The interests of one are not the interests of another. There is conflict at the heart of the relationship.

This plays out most directly for the specific teams allocated to the different accounts Company 2 has with clients in the FMCG sector. Each of the conglomerates has a group of designers and a dedicated account handler. With these groupings come varying hours. It was often remarked upon by participants how the FMCG team worked longer hours than others employed on say, tobacco firms (which we will cover in the next section). 'Big supermarket brands' often required design teams to work until 10 or 11 at night (Author's Interview with Middleweight Designer, 29.2.M.MD, 30/11/2014). They often phone in with last minute changes arising from somewhere along the complex company hierarchy, which can keep designers behind after work catching up (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 9.2.F.SD, 18/03/2014). And within the hours worked, the pace is intense, as FMCG have the pressing need 'to get stuff out as soon as they can move it' (Author's Interview with Middleweight Designer, 29.2.M.MD, 30/11/2014). This condition of the market structures the condition of work for those charged with getting the goods out there selling as soon as possible, conforming to the imperative of circulation with which we associated the measure of SNLT in the presentation of 8 'C's in Chapter 2.

8.8. Tobacco: Standardisation

Company 2 also had a team dedicated to accounts with market-leading tobacco multinationals, like Client 23 (\$20bn annual revenue) and Client 41, a FTSE 100-listed tobacco conglomerate with a £13bn annual revenue. The experience of this work is highly standardised, as new and widespread restrictions on tobacco packaging limit the freedom with which designers can usefully implement brand guidelines. With the health warning taking up over half the visible space, there is scant room to say 'buy me', as one participant put it (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 10.2.F.PO, 18/03/2014). The work, then, is reduced to the routine movements of 'working in a factory', as a middleweight designer at Company 2 suggested, describing it as 'a case of plug in, put your headphones on- like a machine' (Author's Interview with Middleweight Designer, 29.2.M.MD, 30/11/2014). Thus, the regulations standardising packaging standardise the labour performed in their creative production too. In this respect, one can see the persistence of the factory form as the ideal type of capitalist production for value, in spite of the protestations of the postoperaists for the existence of a new 'social' factory no longer conforming to the old (see Chapter 4). For those enduring this standardisation owing to the specificity of tobacco branding, the legalistic concern with public health at the level of the state plays out in a lifeless reduction of creative labour to its most repetitious elements. The work cannot be seen apart from its imbrication in this wider social context.

More generally, in all kinds of client work across all the case study companies encountered in this research, standardisation elsewhere in the economy impacts upon agencies, permitting a certain degree of speed-up and rationalisation in their own working methods. As one designer mentioned 'when you've got clients who have got brand guidelines and colours and things like that then you know that's only going to take an hour' (Author's Interview with Junior Designer, 3.1.F.JD, 15/01/2014).

This standardisation resonates with moves in this direction in agencies more broadly. Many agencies are contracted as 'brand guardians' for certain clients, and as such implement internal policies that guarantee optimum conformity of all work on that account. As Dorland (2009, p.113) contends, because the organisation of time in design directly asserts the relationship between time and money, there is an emphasis upon structures and devices whereby work can be completed as rapidly as possible, codified against existing brand standards and thus given a more certain and assured basis for anticipated success. Success means a better utilisation rate (a feature we will cover in more detail in the next chapter), repeat clients, dependable income and thus the continued prosperity of the design agency itself. The standardising and rationalising processes that make this possible are structured not only by the demands of company, but also those of the client and the prosperity of *their* company. As we shall go on to see, these demands can be conflicting, but more often than not present a contradictory unity. It is the designers themselves who find themselves caught within these demands. And, as far as work with clients in the tobacco industry are concerned, their drive to standardise chimes also with the standardisation of the labour process in agencies themselves, as work is made more amenable to measurement and practical abstraction.

8.9. Commodities & Chemicals: Conscience

Company 6, meanwhile, had built a profile in designing internal and investor communications for commodities, raw materials and logistics firms, like Client 36, an oil company with an annual revenue of \$250bn and Client 37, a FTSE250-listed transport and telecoms company with a £10bn annual revenue. Also represented in the sample are client companies in chemicals, like Client 12, a \$13bn-revenue, Forbes Global 2000-listed multinational with which Company 2 works. The kind of work agencies do for these firms typically relates to reputation management in an era where companies involved in the exploitation of natural resources and other controversial areas work hard to maintain standards of corporate social responsibility. Part of this internal- so, where, for instance, Company 6 worked on inward communications to generate an 'employer brand' for staff members to buy into (Author's Interview with Designer, 30.6.M.D, 30/11/2014). What this suggests is that every aspect of contemporary business is heavily mediatised, and reliant on the manipulation of symbolic meaning. Thus, creative agencies are recruited not only to sell goods but to engineer more efficient employee communications. Their pivotal role in the capitalist economy expands as companies centre increasingly on forming new kinds of personalised bonds with their human resources.

Other jobs with such clients are more outward-facing, for instance where Company 2 created a more positive public image for Client 12, who, by working with genetically modified organisms, had accrued a 'negative connotation' in the popular imagination (Author's Interview with Account Handler, 5.2.M.CS, 19/02/2014). The brand exercise sought to replace this image with one centred on addressing global problems of hunger and population, an account handler attached to the project told me. This displays the extent to which creative agencies act as the good conscience of companies in an age where reputation matters. And this maintenance of standing benefits the agencies too. Often implicated through the client relationship with unsavoury areas of business, agencies like Company 9, to make amends for their

work with big tobacco firms, do *pro bono* charity work to offset the societal issues associated with aiding the circulation of cigarettes as commodities (Author's Interview with Designer, 33.9.M.D, 14/01/2015). But even this is done for the purposes of the agency portfolio. Charity campaigns can accrue significant exposure, not to mention industry awards and the future work that attends them. This generous concession should not be seen apart from the agency's own needs as a business to maintain a good outward image in pursuit of money.

Agencies acting as the good conscience of firms complicit in social costs highlights a wider relationship with the circulation of goods and services. By exploiting what Lazzarato calls a 'feedback loop' between production and consumption (1996), they connect clients with the wider sentiment of consumer society at large. Company 2's strategy department 'analyses the market' and what 'the world thinks' about clients and their products (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 7.2.F.SD, 25/02/2014).

This status as strategic guarantor of the security of circulation has an impact upon how the work agencies do on a day-to-day basis. Emails, meetings, sudden *volte faces* and adjustments: the agency is subject to multiple clients and their problems. This makes it hard for those charged with completing the work to gain a satisfactory rhythm in which to create (Author's Interview with Designer, 14.FL.M.D, 05/06/2014). By fielding the many problems of their many clients in all manner of corporate sectors, agencies troubleshoot incoming issues for the firms with which they work, responding to all and sundry and fixing the constant cycle of issues of presentation and image that accompany the contingent rhythms of the market in consumer goods. The retail brands serviced by one participant 'don't always see what's coming' (Author's Interview with Designer, 21.FL.M.D, 11/07/2014). They are 'more reactive than proactive' and this means that decisions are taken on the spur of the moment. Agencies are part of the infrastructure that enable them to maintain reputation- and with it, consumer sentiment- in the unpredictable conditions of capitalist valorisation.

8.10. Conclusion

In one way, as we have seen, creative agencies are, as one participant put it, 'a business like any other', with graphic design 'a commercial art' (Author's Interview with Designer, 30.6.M.D, 30/11/2014). But equally important are the business interests of the clients with which they work. The creative industries' 'close ties' with 'selling stuff' structure their own imperatives. As we saw in Chapter 7, the creative industries take a pivotal role in the circuit of capital. This was reflected in the various testimonies of participants with regard to their experience of working in a field so closely intertwined with the fortunes of firms selling goods and services on the market. On one hand, this pivotal status relates to the imperative to sell through the cultivation of company image. 'If you want to be successful you've got to advertise', as one designer put it, 'and to advertise you might have to have a new brand' (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 4.1.M.SD, 15/01/2014). But, on the other, creative agencies intervene in the character of the good sold itself, as the mediatization and aestheticization of products gathers apace. As another participant said, 'it's a huge thing now, 'image economies'. There's a huge amount of money in it, most products are sold on their aesthetic' (Author's Interview with Designer, 32.8.M.D, 14/01/2015). The agencies investigated here were at the centre of these tendencies. And certain implication for work and its measure follow from it, as we shall see in the final two chapters.

In these chapters, we will see how the auspicious creative sensibility of design 'variegate[s] and fragment[s]' working processes (Moor and Julier, 2009, p.7) and the steps taken by agencies to deal with this. In this chapter, we have seen how this fits within a wider sectoral context whereby the industry as a whole has a strong degree

of structural fragmentation and heterogeneity. However, the success of design businesses rests upon some degree of standardisation and rationalisation. This is for two reasons. Firstly, design companies need to define themselves clearly in a competitive business environment and distinguish them based on clear concrete measures. Secondly, both public and private sector organisations increasingly display a similar dominance of codification, accountability and audit culture. These organisations are the client base of agencies. They exert the implicit or stated demand for similar frameworks to be utilised in the presentation of the value and success of design services. Agencies, therefore, face pressure to conform to prevailing standards. They depend upon the custom of business and public administration from which these standards issue.

The trends towards systematisation and routinisation are caused not by cultures of audit themselves. Rather, they are linked to the 'greater economic role' that design assumes in 'advanced capitalist societies' (Moor and Julier, 2009, p.13). As mentioned, creative industries play a crucial role in guaranteeing commoditization. They thus become more deeply implicated as an essential element of the functioning of the capitalist mode of production. In so doing, design takes on many of the traits of capitalist enterprises. This can be seen as taking place for two contradictory but intertwined purposes. The first is that there is a greater take-up of means of increasing productivity. These include the routinisation, intensification and greater control of labour through technological devices. This is in response to generalised attempt to differentiate internally on the grounds of efficiency and profitability in the context of fierce competition. We will see the effects of this implementation in Chapter 10.

Secondly, however, we witness the attempt to render one's company and its products comparable with other capitalist enterprises. We have noted the social process by which all things are brought into relationship with all other things for the purposes of equivalence and exchange. The standardisation, codification and auditing of the work that takes place in design and its output contributes towards this. A capitalist system of exchange relies upon differentiation, but also on comparability. Take institutionalised ways of measuring potential and actual value creation and other indicators such as cost margins, profits, and working hours, for instance. On one hand, these help client companies and other parties to assess productivity. But they also allow the comparison of production processes and their output with other such processes and outputs in the field of capitalist production and exchange as a whole. This standardisation and rationalisation is subject to the pressure upon design agencies, as part of the essential infrastructure of contemporary capitalism, to conform to a set of wider social practices. As we have seen, these are rooted in dynamics at the very core of capitalism and the commodity form. These dynamics manifest in the creative industries in particular and interesting ways. For instance, they bring the self-understood identities of employees as creative workers into conflict with other dominating logics and rationales. The activities and products of creative industries do not give themselves up so easily to the quantification and commensuration upon which capitalism depends. Where capitalism is faced with certain risks, these are exacerbated in creative industries, and dealt with in specific ways we will encounter in the coming chapters.

These characteristics are absorbed, osmosis-like, by virtue of agencies' relationships with their clients. The profile of the client companies covered in the sample is of course non-exhaustive. But this panorama demonstrates the pivotal status of the creative industries in working with many of the world's biggest companies and brands, and the extent to which, by researching creative agencies, we can reach beyond the immediate context to gain a sense of its imbrication in wider corporate imperatives associated with market pressures of profit and valorisation.

9. KEY FEATURES OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

9.1. Introduction

In this chapter I extract some common features of the creative process shared by the companies that comprise the sample. At every step, I emphasise the points of conflict and tension that ensue around the struggle to bring measure to what appears at first glance to be immeasurable. The assignation of economic value to chunks of work time is not an easy process, but something which is subject to struggle on the part of both employer and employee, and a series of practical interactions. In this chapter, I focus on four stages or elements of the creative labour process around which we can build an understanding of the struggles waged for and against measure and abstraction in creative agencies. This reveals the processes of valuation and measurement represented in the system of billable hours to be composed of largely contingent and contested practices wide open to critical inquiry.

These iterative stages and features, taken together, give an overview of the internal mechanics of graphic design, branding and advertising agencies and the work that takes place within them. They are pitching, billable hours, utilisation and arbitrage.

9.2. Pitching

The first stage of any project in graphic design, advertising or branding is the pitch and initial attempts at pricing the initial work, which might not always fall under the rubric of billable hours- the process of determining which we will discuss in more detail in the next section. But the valuations, abstractions and objectifications that occur at the pitching stage have a rolling impact through every other step of the design process and the work that takes place within it.

The process of pitching is the means by which agencies attain work in the first place. That this is a 'process' indicates that it is usually not as simple as a client seeking someone to do some work and recruiting an agency to do so. As a designer at Company 1 asserted, there has been a step change in a growingly competitive industry, from a previous situation where clients would choose agencies 'on the basis of portfolio or reputation' to one where they 'appoint [through] a tender process' (Author's Interview with Designer, 1.1.M.D, 15/01/2014). This 'tender' process is characterised by three aspects, more or less uniform across the agencies and experiences covered in this research. Firstly, the agency will compete with a handful of other agencies for the work. Secondly, the pitching process incorporates the delivery of 'something pretty tangible' on which the client can base their decision. Thirdly, this will largely be unpaid, save a few expenses covered by the client in the best-case scenario.

For some of the reasons discussed in Chapter 8, the corporate context in which pitching takes place increasingly witnesses intensified competition between agencies to secure clients. Fixed-price contracts are often subject to the initial desire of the agency to form a good working relationship with the client, yet often entail a state of affairs whereby the risk of loss is shifted entirely onto their shoulders. Indeed, sometimes agencies will 'agree to terms that are far below cost' (Yakura, 2001, p.1086, pp.1088-9). In creative industries like graphic design, branding and advertising, this begins with the pitch, which is unpaid. By working hard to create a more or less fully worked-out design or brand strategies ahead of the point at which the billed hours begin, agencies thereby 'take a hit' in the hope that the client will choose them for the job at hand and, crucially, work thereafter. This positioning pervades, as we shall see, the whole creative process. Already the supposedly autonomous creativity of 'immaterial labour' is hemmed in by circumstances that owe to the unfolding of the value-form through mediation by means of money in the market.

As one creative director at Company 2 said, '[s]ometimes we'll do things, we'll work it massively over the budget for the project, we'll spend, you know, hundreds of thousands over, but with the prospect of having millions in return, so' (Author's Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014). Not only will the company work unpaid on the pitch itself, but, in quoting the client a price, will go in under what they expect to outlay in order to secure the contract, 'willing to almost lose a bit of money to gain the experience and to gain them as a client' (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 2.1.F.PO, 15/01/2014).

As we shall see, the full force of such an arrangement often falls squarely on the workers by whom the project is carried out. The distribution of risk is thereby decided by a struggle. And this distribution is experienced differentially across the organisation. Different workers perform different roles at different stages of the process. More senior staff are involved at the pitching stage, where, unbilled, they work relatively freely on meeting the initial brief, where, as one participant suggested, the rhythm of work is more relaxed- although it can be more intense towards the deadline or where a quick turnaround is required (Author's Interview with Designer, 31.7.M.D, 14/01/2015). Indeed, the major part of the job is already done by the time the pitch is submitted- in that, as one managing director I interviewed suggested, £64 million of a £65 million job is represented in that initial idea, the initial slogan or colour scheme for instance (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014). All that follows is to give it material existence. And so, the pitched plan, following some iteration with the client, are then enacted by more junior staff once the contract is secured, at which point the work falls under the framework of billable hours and all the rationalisation and close measurement that this entails. This division of labour is hardwired into the design profession in the Netherlands, with separate words and schooling systems for the two kinds of activity:

I'm a senior designer [and] I'm always more involved at the beginning where the concept phase is really important, just to make up good ideas and starting setting out routes and directions, yeah, concept roots which will follow into designs and will be refined and in the late stage the more junior designers will enter then [...]. In Holland we actually have two words for design: *ontwerper* and *vormgever*, and *ontwerper* means where you have a creative thought about it, there's a concept, and *vormgever* is making it look pretty, it's more the crafting part [*literally 'form-giver'*]. There's even two different studies for it, at all different levels. So if you go to art school, you will learn how to *ontwerp*, which is more the creative stuff and like a degree lower, different schools, and then it's just giving shape and more like actually learning how to [do it]. (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 7.2.F.SD, 25/02/2014)

Interestingly, the concept of 'form-giver' here harks back to our theorisation of creative industries as connected to a kind of 'form-giving fire', in Marx's terms, considered in Chapter 7. It suggests the relationship between creative labour and the production of the commodity *form*, as distinct from its *content*. Concretely, the *ontwerper* will be involved more at the pitching stage on big-picture thinking, with an attendant freedom to explore different avenues of interest and inspiration. Similarly, the specific kind of client will dictate the seniority of the staff member put on the job at the pitching stage. As a production and operations manager at Company 4 explained, 'if it's a more prestige client, or a client we're really trying to form a relationship with, or we know it's a particular design style that will be really suited to them, then we might put more of a senior guy on it. But if it's a project with a lower budget and we're just doing it to be able to meet our required revenue for that quarter then we'll put one of the junior guys on it' (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 23.4.F.PO, 21/07/2014).

The division between the concrete activities of *ontwerper* and *vormgever* is also one of price. At Company 1, for instance, ‘simple artwork layout [is] charged at the lower rate’ of £40 an hour, whereas more ‘conceptual’ work is priced at the higher rate of £60 an hour. A production and operations manager told me that one job, for a client in the public and charity sector, was spending £7,000 on the concept alone, ‘before you’ve even *made* anything’ (Author’s Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 2.1.F.PO, 15/01/2014). This highlights how the conceptual part- the ascription of a ‘cultural content’ to a commodity, whether a good or a service, is in fact the crucial element in rendering it exchangeable, in line with the theorisation given in Chapter 1. This hierarchy of form over content passes over into the price awarded the creation of each in the design and branding production process.

But, more often than not, the ‘idea’ generated at the pitching stage is not paid for upfront, despite occupying what one designer called the most ‘creative time’ of the process (Author’s Interview with Designer, 1.1.M.D, 15/01/2014). In ‘alot of the tendering type of work’, he told me, ‘you’ve already sold an idea to the client’, in effect, and it is only ‘at that point you get appointed’. The problem is, there is no clear way of valuing the idea generated through the pitch, because it has no monetary expression in a price paid by the client. Moreover, ‘an idea is obviously very abstract in its nature and you can’t put a price on it’ (Author’s Interview with Designer, 30.6.M.D, 30/11/2014). The freer use of time involved in thinking up a response to a creative brief does not provide an easy quantitative metric from which to read off a pre-emptory abstract temporal impression of value. Thus, there are *problems* of measurability afflicting the creative industries, the overcoming of which I survey in the next chapter. But in no sense is there the *crisis* attributed to them by the postoperaists, and critiqued in Chapter 6. Measure persists regardless.

In this persistence, the difficulty of pricing the idea generated at the pitching stage feeds through into the practice of work over the course of the ensuing process of production. A notional abstract ‘price’ takes on a practical existence in the lived experience of work itself. The price of the pitch, hazy and incoherent in and of itself, becomes established through the institutional logics and practices employed to turn a profit on the back of the initial expenditure of unpaid hours. This is experienced differentially, and generates antagonism, arrhythmia and conflict. For every creative liberty taken by the more richly rewarded senior designer at the pitching stage, a constraint is placed upon the design who implements the pitch once the contract is signed. This is because agencies are keen to ‘take a hit’ at the pitching stage in order to bring in projects. Overworking a pitch may occupy unpaid time but will guarantee the job is secured. The hours billed out to the client for the job itself are then used to make up the shortfall caused by unpaid hours being expended at the pitching stage, which is rarely if ever covered by the client. As one creative director at Company 2 explained, ‘we effectively do a phase of work for free just to secure the work, and then we’ll associate those hours to the project later on’ (Author’s Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014). More generally, the unproductive and unpaid time invested in unsuccessfully pitching for work will be distributed over the hours costed for work successfully pitched for. The rate of unsuccessful pitches is high for a variety of factors. In a competitive sector, there is a finite amount of work to go around, and the entry of lower-cost design solutions through the internet-driven ‘gig economy’ has made it easier for established agencies like those studied here to be undercut. Furthermore, clients are cagey about the budget they are working with. On one hand, as a designer at Company 1 told me, agencies will ‘work up a scheme’ for work totalling £20,000, only to find the company has half that to spend ((Author’s Interview with Designer, 1.1.M.D, 15/01/2014). And, in an economic climate where companies across the board are seeking to cut costs, potential clients will use the pitch as a chance to gather ideas from more skilled and expensive firms only to redistribute the

insights their pitches contain to lower-cost agencies able to implement the concepts already delivered for free (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014). This draws on the same tendency towards fragmentation and competition covered in Chapter 8, as upstart studios steal work from under the noses of big design firms.

There are a number of impediments, therefore, to successfully pitching for work. And, in a context where even successful pitches go unpaid, the formally unproductive (because unpaid) time must be made up for elsewhere. Indeed, even where a pitch is successful, usually an agency will offer up to three 'routes', only one of which the client selects, leaving aside the other two and thus rendering unproductive the time invested in their conceptualisation. Over all these stages, seniors have laboured in a more or less conceptual and creatively unburdened way. But, once the more junior-level design staff get around to working up a design into the end deliverable, there arises a generalised imperative to cut corners and complete work in less time than formally billed and budgeted for. As we shall see later, this produces working rhythms counterintuitive to the creative sensibility of the designer, accessed through the rhythmanalytical method set out in Chapter 3.

9.3. Billable hours

The mechanism by which these constraints are enforced kicks in as soon as the creative worker's comes under the rubric of billable hours. This is thus the key aspect of the foregoing study.

The findings in Elaine Yakura's study of the IT industry (2001) suggest that billable hours arise out of necessity in response to a situation whereby the work in question is 'difficult to value'. Billable hours help bring measure to this valuation. Whilst acting as a marker of performance, billable hours also 'help to legitimate the value' of the work in question by 'assigning uniform [monetary] rates to the hours billed'. However, billing practices might assign a uniform value to the hours worked even where 'the realities belie that uniformity'. What appears transparently, then, may in fact be only apparently transparent. But the aim of this research is to 'get behind' the transparency and attempt to reveal it for what it really is- to make the 'transparent' transparent.

Yakura considers those occasions at which the valuation of billable hours as valuable does not correspond to the alleged 'reality' which underlies this valuation. The amount that shows on the invoice received by the client is at the mercy of 'contextual events and factors', leading to tensions and disputes in the exact valuation of billed hours. 'When this happens', she suggests, 'the arbitrary nature of the valuation process becomes apparent.' (2001, p.1077). As Yakura suggests, by means of an exploration of the 'breach' in which the equivalence between time and money is not achieved, the 'taken-for-granted process through which time is transformed into money' may be 'rendered visible'.

On the other hand, Yakura suggests, when the system works efficiently and as planned, the 'valorization of time' is accomplished 'invisibly and seamlessly'. This is partly achieved by means of 'automatic and mundane' procedures of accounting and monitoring by the worker and their management. For instance, time sheets are completed which are then logged on a computer system and calculated on the basis of the hourly billing rate which each designer is considered to be 'worth'. The routine, automatic nature of this process and the seamless appearance of these administrative practices have a tendency to 'mask[] certain anomalies' which might arise in the process of completing the work of which hours are billed (2001, p.1084-6). But, for us, the nature of the billing system is such that it abstracts from the reality of concrete labour a series of objective economic categories that take on a life of their own and 'render invisible' any questions or doubts around their operation. It is the

investigation of the tensions and ruptures that take place when the smooth operation of billing procedures is breached that enables these questions to become visible, uncovering what is sublated in the forms of real appearance the objective economic categories assume.

As the small amount of previous research on the topic shows, of which Yakura is one of the most sustained engagements, billable hours are used in many industries and sectors to charge work out to clients and keep internal account of time use. They are common in consultancy and the law profession. What makes billable hours specifically interesting to us in the case of the creative industries is their relationship to the claims made of creative labour in the literature on immaterial labour surveyed in Chapters 6 and 7, and what this in turn tells us about the claims made more generally about creative industries as spaces of creative freedom and liberation from traditional work relations.

One participant noted that in most companies he had worked for previously, 'there hasn't been a direct recording of physical hours to work on a project- it's been more, that's your job so get on with it, and then [...]. So it's quite different actually, when you're in the agency environment, it's entirely on billable hours, which is completely different' (Author's Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014). So, what is this specificity? Why and how do billable hours come about in the creative industries? Many of the companies incorporated in the case studies had not met the reality of billing hours out to clients as a natural fact. Agencies typically start on a small-scale basis, inspired by the desire of the founders to create 'beautiful work' and generate a portfolio that would enable the ability to subsist through the realisation of their unrealistic and repressed artistic tendencies under the cover of a corporate context. But, addressing themselves to that corporate context, detailed in Chapters 7 and 8, in which the main players seek a margin based on minor gains in consumer appeal attained by a tweak in packaging or advertising provided by creative agencies, the relaxed, non-hierarchical and uncalculating motivations become increasingly at the mercy of the need to make their work processes transparent and understandable to the corporations on which they rely for a living. And, further down the line, mergers and acquisitions subsume these smaller agencies within big media and advertising conglomerates and the paths of profitability and accountability they pace in pursuit of shareholder value, as described in the previous chapter.

All this takes place in a sectoral situation whereby what is produced and when is marked by considerable uncertainty and ephemerality. Hence, the reaction to pressures at the business end and the unknowability of creative production is to institute more rigorous ways of accounting for the work that takes place and collecting a revenue in line with the work completed. As one managing director and agency owner explained, it was necessary to implement a billing and monitoring system whereby 'people have to keep their hours' for the reason that, 'for many years', the non-hierarchical Company 4 'didn't really know how long we were putting to each project and that didn't make any sense' (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 24.4.M.M, 21/07/2014). It made it impossible to make estimates for how long new projects would take based on the expectations and standards established in previous cycles.

We will deal with how billable hours structure the practice and experience of work later in the chapter. But for now it is important to set out the process by which billable hours manifest as an organising mechanism, which is by means of their status as the interface between client and agency on a monetary and contractual level. There were a handful of distinct approaches to how the price of an hour was set, and the relationship of this price to how the work it values is both performed and measured. It

is on this terrain that agencies seek a profit margin- something we will look at more closely in the next section, on utilisation.

The decisions made about how many hours to bill are largely subservient to the specific corporate context in which the client themselves sit. Very often, the hours billed will depend upon the perceived sensitivity of the client as to expenditure (Alvehus and Spicer, 2012, p.501). If the client is, say, a large company likely to care less about the tightest of margins, one could charge more hours than actually worked. However, if the company wishes to secure the future custom of a potential long-term client, then it may seem expedient to charge for less hours than those actually worked. Thus outward-facing decisions to do with the corporate character of the company with which the contract is signed, and, importantly, the wider economic context in which they operate, feed down right through the enactment of creative practice on a given design, brand or strategy. One can tell little from the immediate form of labour without a sense of this.

Within these configurations of company and client, different approaches exist for seeking to make a margin on the hours billed out. Some agencies price an hour out to a client based upon the costs it covers only. A managing director at Company 5 explained how his agency worked on this basis. The hourly rate charged out to clients will primarily represent the salary of the specific creative or creatives who work on the job- here the process of arbitrage whereby workers at different levels of the company- junior or senior designers, strategists- are delegated and negotiate over specific hours tied to different jobs. We will look in more detail at arbitrage in a later section.

It will also take into account overheads like rent, electric and heating (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014). This then gives the amount charged out to the client. The implication of this approach is that the agency seeks profit based on the intensification of creative labour so as to complete work in less hours than charged to the client. The budget of billable hours becomes a target on which to improve rather than a true account of the specific amount of creative freedom- vis-a-vis time limitations- a team of creatives enjoy on a project. In this sense, the hours posit a direct relationship between, on one hand, the workers employed and work completed on a project and, on the other, the price at which the work is billed out. But, contained within this seamless appearance is the wider social totality of relations around not only profit but the web of congealed social relations constituting the materiality of the work's possibility itself- rent, utilities, energy and so on. As we saw in Chapter 8, these factors themselves are at stake in urban city space where gentrification, spiralling rent and intense sectoral competitive place agencies, and, in turn, the livelihoods of creative labourers, at risk. That these relations are antagonistic is just one of the contradictions against which the construction of a smooth space of abstract quantity must contend and, ultimately, contain within its real appearance. The measure, here, constitutes a conceptuality that contains and refers to a non-conceptuality, in line with the schema outlined in Chapter 3.

Other agencies, like Company 1, factor their desired margin into the pricing of the hour itself. As a Production and Operations Manager at Company 1 told me, an hour of a designer's time but might only cost the company £12 an hour, but 'we're selling them out at £45, so there's a real big mark up there' (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 2.1.F.PO, 15/01/2014). Contrary to formulaic understandings of exploitation as relating only to the surplus-value representing the difference between the value of an hour of a worker's time next to the value as it accrues to their employer, and, therefore, by extension implying a more calculative work environment where every minute is extracted from the worker in pursuit of profit, here the pricing in of a margin above and beyond the value of the hour as worked by the creative labourer actually, more often than not, goes hand-in-hand with a less

intense work schedule. Because the company has already factored in the profit it must seek to survive into the hour billed out to the client, there is consequently less pressure placed upon the worker to complete jobs in less time than budgeted in accordance with the contract between agency and client. Hence, the billable hour itself- at the 'business end of things' whereby it is the unit of account of the relationship between the client as end user and agency as service provider'- wields an effect on the everyday lived experience of creative work from the inception of a given round of production. The measure, as repeated throughout, brings about the measured- with the crisis mooted by Negri *et al*/ possible only where the two are seen as independent of one another, or, in other words, where value is seen to relate not to a social form of the mediate relationship between things and their producers, but rather the quantification of direct labour time from a distance.

9.4. Utilisation

These different approaches to determining the price of an hour are reflected in different approaches to what is called 'utilisation', measured through the 'utilisation rate'. As detailed in Alvehus and Spicer's case study of a professional service firm (2012), companies depend upon their utilisation rate acting as the key indicator of organisational success and margins of cost and profit. 'Utilisation rate' refers to the total number of billable hours divided by the total working hours. In the words of one staff member, 'utilization totally determines the survival of the firm', showing how much of the firm's time is generating income from clients (2012, p.501).

Billable hours are not the only hours worked by the creatives involved in this study. Alongside 'chargeable hours'- in other words, those the company can charge out to clients- are so-called 'non-chargeable' hours, given their own 'code' in the time budget, such as, for instance 'XX' for internal or '99' for client related, as was the case at Company 2 (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 10.2.F.PO, 18/03/2014). Those considered 'internal' are accounted for by 'studio non-chargeable' hours, where a designer, for instance, takes a phone call, discusses a project with a colleague, or maintains the company library of images and literature. The external hours more commonly come under 'sales non-chargeable'. These are all the customer-facing tasks that take up time but cannot be directly charged for. One participant found half her time falling in this bracket. And those 40 hours ended up being the 40 hours she worked every week on top of her salaried hours (Author's Interview with Account Handler, 28.2.F.CS, 30/11/2014). Because the hours she worked over and above those for which she was paid occupied 'sales non-chargeable', they effectively fell off the balance sheet altogether, unrecognised by the company because posited as unproductive.

The aim, however, in most companies is to maximise chargeable (or billable hours) against non-chargeable. This gives the sum of 'effective hours'. Company-wide, this tends to be a ratio of 70:30, as in Company 1. Individually, respondents suggested this works out much the same, with one designer at Company 4 working around 46 hours a week of which 30 were billable or, as he put it, 'effective' (Author's Interview with Designer, 25.4.M.D, 21/07/2014). The outcome of this way of evaluating hours is to liquidate those that are not effective, casting them out from under the sign of value as unproductive and worthless. As we shall see, this has an effect on the lived experience of this reduction in practice, where a whole portion of the working day is forgotten and ceases to exist as reality is reconstructed in the form of the timesheet. This shows that 'utilisation' is not a static principle. A given task or activity is not productive or valuable in and of itself; rather its designation as billable or otherwise is the arbiter of this status. Utilisation may be seen an accounting practice rather than something that is actively pursued in the work that takes place. Alvehus and Spicer

(2012, p.501) suggest that, rather than accurately representing the full utilisation of the hours agreed between client and contractor,

the bill is almost always a post facto construction. Sometimes the amount of time spent on a specific job is less than what can be charged to the client, and sometimes all the time spent cannot be charged. Thus, there is no clear-cut relation between how much time is spent on the job and how much the client is billed, even though the client's bill is written in terms of hours spent.

This highlights a contradiction at the centre of utilisation. The utilisation rate is commonly considered to represent 'how close we are actually in reality to how much we estimated' (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 9.2.F.SD, 18/03/2014). But what the utilisation rate in fact does is construct a new reality to match the estimate. The utilisation rate introduces a compulsion to fit what one does to the budgeted hours set out in the initial scheme of work as agreed with the client. On one hand, anything that falls outside is rebranded as 'non-chargeable' or reallocated over the wider totality of projects. On the other, people find ways to work that conform more closely to the expectations of the injunction to 'make every minute chargeable'.

This impacts upon both the practice of the work and how it is recorded. One designer told me how he and his colleagues had started 'putting in other job numbers for waiting, or just for doing other stuff'. There's even a job number 'for leaving early on a Friday' (Author's Interview with Middleweight Designer, 29.2.M.MD, 30/11/2014). This secures the illusion of utilisation and 'effective hours'. Another designer, undergoing the imposition of a new utilisation drive at a firm facing financial pressures, found himself wandering around the studio seeing if 'anyone wanted any help' so as 'to find something to fill up' his timesheet (Author's Interview with Designer, 30.6.M.D, 30/11/2014). The measure takes on a life of its own, to which the activity it notionally represents in number must conform.

As concerns the measurement of these hours to fit the specifications set out in the client agreement, Company 2 sought to 'charge out' 8 hours a day to the client, even though their employees were employed only to work 7.5 (Author's Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014). This introduces a pressure around how designers use their time. Even at their busiest, the attainment of the utilisation rate remained always beyond reach. The apparent transparency the utilisation rate establishes- giving what purported to be an accurate representation of the worker's time use- creates only an impression of what goes on rather than accurately renders it in a ratio. As one designer told me, at the end of every year Company 7 reveal the 'amount of unbilled hours, and then they show how much money that loses' (Author's Interview with Designer, 31.7.M.D, 14/01/2015). What is shown to the assembled designers never resembles their experience of those hours as worked and lived. The participant said that, whilst 'that's how it is on paper, 'in reality it always feels slightly different and actually that's not the case. There's never blank spaces anywhere. No-one just sits there and does nothing.' What this goes to show is that the quantification of billable hours is belied by its qualitative basis, and that the dissimilarity between the concrete reality and abstract quantity of hours billed is generally accepted as a principal fact of the operation of such businesses. It is not an aberration or corruption of creative work but its continuing- yet contradictory- condition of possibility, which realises in denial- sublates, as defined in Chapter 3- the practical activity it makes recognisable to the world of capital under the sign of value.

The numbers involved in the quantitative representation of the work refract that work through different compulsions and relationships to fit the expectations of the agency and its clients. The utilisation rate is not, after all, related to what the client is charged. That amount is already set, a contracted fee. Rather it represents how the agency turns a profit within the framework of that amount. As we have seen, and will see, the

specific approach the company implements in order to turn a profit within these constraints is crucial to the work conditions found at the agency in question. The findings of the research reveal that the reliance of the organisation upon the income accrued through the billable hours charged to clients meant that the whole balance of the activities of both the firm and its employees were disproportionately towards the 'utilisation' of the hours it was possible to bill in the framework of a contract.

Thus the company generates monetary value in the one way open to it to do so, by charging clients to the greatest extent for the work contracted. The salaried hours as far as possible should be utilised as profit-making billable hours. In the event of a job going over the time-budget allocated for the project, a negative effect may be seen to be exerted upon the total utilisation rate of both designer and company.

Essential to this is the full utilisation of the billable hours available. There are different approaches to utilisation, as my study evidences. These relate to how the billable hour is priced. And they in turn impact on the rhythm of creative work in the case study agencies covered. Further, they generate different points of tension around the processes of valuation and management billable hours make transparent.

Where the margin is not priced in and must be chased, companies work on the basis of 'Gross Profit Average' spread over all jobs. As one participant suggested, the complexion of the budget for each job is dependent on the context under which the contract is agreed. As seen in the first section on pitching, often companies will go in 'overpromising' on the work they deliver in comparison with the cost, so as to secure future custom from the client. In this case, they take a hit which must be made up elsewhere. Thus, the search for profit takes the form of a gross average distributed over all jobs. The aim is still to complete jobs under the budget of hours agreed with the client, but where one runs over the shortfall can be made up elsewhere:

from a business point of view, you almost have to use, gauge a bit of an average because when you've, if you've quoted 36 hours of design in a week, you may achieve those 36 hours in 20, so you've gained. You somehow, sometimes, have to look at the whole, entire workload. Not just each individual job because you can gain in one's where you've lost with time. And that's how we've arrived at the Gross Profit Average, which is what we try to achieve across the board [...]. You always try to better the time that you've quoted. That's the main aim, and what we do is we, when we put the quote together, the job goes live, on the inside cover of the job bag we put on the inside the hours that we've quoted to that job, so the designer opens the bag and instantly they know, 'okay, we've quoted two hours, we'll try and do it in an hour and a half (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 2.1.F.PO, 15/01/2014)

The other approach to utilisation is to try, as far as possible, to work the hours allocated, but price the margin in. At Company 4 the margin is 'already factored in', as a participant who oversees production and operations told me.

We have profit, per person, per hour, and I have a vague idea of, um, these people are senior, and their senior salary means, um, hourly the cost to the company is say, 70 euros per hour, so therefore, we're making 40 something. And then it goes all the way down to the intern. Obviously, yeah, we're making the profit per person per hour. (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 23.4.F.PO, 21/07/2014)

Hence, the margin and its measurement are individualised down to the specific employee. The extra scrutiny to which creatives at this agency were subject- including a stringent regime of time monitoring and the imposition of new technological solutions to support it- emphasises the extent to which the relationship with the hour, via the utilisation rate, structures and dominates the experience and practice of creative work.

Other companies differed slightly, using a variation on this approach whereby the margin and its measurement were spread out over all workers and all projects. Company 2 goal 'is to make money', I was told (Author's Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014). They added thirteen percent onto each project, firstly by taking the number of hours needed, pricing that up- say, 90,000 euros, and then adding thirteen percent. As the interviewee, a creative director, noted, 'we're making money on those hours straight away'. But this priced-in margin still, as in the gross average approach, tends to end up distributed out over the totality of projects rather than being individualised per worker, in order to account for occasions where the agency is competing for a client's future custom by over-pitching, for instance, so that the overwork could be made up elsewhere. As one participant explained that 'you probably quote let's say twenty hours for a job, knowing that that would be keen enough to win it but realistically you know it's probably gonna be more like thirty. And, um, so you end up putting on that extra ten hours plus perhaps more at the end', with the loss offset by those that come in under' (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 4.1.M.SD, 15/01/2014). This is a specific issue for ambitious branding firms like Company 7, where, one participant told me, the company were putting in more hours than they were being paid for (Author's Interview with Designer, 31.7.M.D, 14/01/2015). On two clients in the last year, they had come in precisely on budget or just under. On one, they were putting in a lot less work for the money they were getting. This offset the hit taken on those that were significantly over. This business model is based on losing money on most jobs, but making it up on one or two big projects with multinational corporations. In a sector marked by intensifying competitive pressures between agencies, more and more creative firms were forced to pitch for work on the basis of budgets they knew were too low, as the agencies selected to tender for work jostle to secure a down-payment on possible future success.

In light of this context, one participant at Company 2 told me that '[a] lot of the times of course we try and stick to the budget as much as possible but there are times when we go under budget or over budget'. But, by distributing out their margin over the totality of jobs as a whole, Company 2 were able to offset the hit taken by habitually overpitching, along with most other companies I came across (Author's Interview with Account Handler, 5.2.M.CS, 19/02/2014).

Where the margin is priced in, there is no mystification involved on the part of the worker who sees their work trade for more outside the company than within. That the billable hour should structure production makes clear that the company carves its margin by paying the worker less hour-by-hour than the client is prepared to pay. This transparency is an interesting implication of the use of billable hours. And it has consequences for the expression of forms of resistance around the politics of creativity. One participant 'stumbled across' what people were charged out at. As a freelancer, he would charge between £160 and £200 a day. The agency, on the other hand, charge him out at £270 or £300- 'more than I could get away with charging for' individually, he said- and the strategists, art directors and senior creatives would be charged out at £300 more than that, up to and including £700 a day (Author's Interview with Designer, 31.7.M.D, 14/01/2014). This transparency produces resentment and tensions. These centre principally on the process of 'arbitrage' by which different workers are priced out at different levels for different tasks, often with the outcome that they substitute for one another when the fixed demarcations of their roles place constraints on the agency's capacity to get the job done on time and budget. These antagonisms and contradictions are contained within the appearance of economic objectivity established in the billable hour, along the lines of the negative dialectical understanding of the relationship between abstract and concrete given in Chapter 3.

9.5. Arbitrage

For Alvehus and Spicer arbitrage is where employees ‘exploit differential rates for billable hours between seniors and juniors within the firm’ (2012, p.506). Agencies tend to agree a ballpark price based on the budget of the client and the desirability of retaining the client’s custom. Then it is a case of dividing that fee up among the human resources at their disposal. Company 2, a participant told me, ‘do a set fee, so they ‘look, you’ve got this much money to do this’, that means x amount of time, for a junior designer, for a senior designer [...]. So they can go ‘who’s best for the job’ and then like count how much time can they afford on it’ (Author’s Interview with Designer, 6.2.M.D, 19/02/2014). Another told me that they would say to themselves well we think they’ve got x amount of money, or we know for a fact that they’ve got, say, eighty thousand, so we’ll then try and populate our time over that eighty-thousand-pounds worth- or euros or whatever it is- and then we’ll work out how many hours we can associate for each of the designers’ (Author’s Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014). But then, as the client’s wishes become clearer in the early iterative stages and the project mutates, they will return to that initial schedule of hours and ‘pull a few hours or days out from people’s allocations and meet the requirement’, often motivated by a need to meet the project outcomes on a tight turnaround or budget owing to having ‘overpromised’ work to a client they hope to keep for future contracts.

Thus the corporate context impinges very directly on the way in which work is performed and how this is shared out among different groups of workers. And with this distribution come different regimes of time pressure and measurement. As a senior designer at Company 1 explained, he is often told that ‘the client won’t pay for five hours, they’ll only pay for the three.’ And, he said ‘that’s kind of where you end up working to, and trying to do the same job in that time span’ (Author’s Interview with Senior Designer, 4.1.M.SD, 15/01/2014). Production is monetary from the outset, as set out in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Value is ‘posited’ at the commencement of production, and enforced through practical abstractions which tear labour from its concrete performance and experience to abstract from it measures of time and effort.

The relationship with the client participates in the positing of parameters of time and value that themselves reflect abstract economic compulsions from elsewhere in the capitalist economy. This pressure at the business end of things leads to the renegotiation of time and task distribution between different layers of the company hierarchy. Here, in spite of the apparently non-hierarchical environments of the agencies featured in the study, the differentiation between different roles and their value to the company is expressed. At Company 2, one of the more expensive agencies, a junior designer is charged out at £100 an hour, a middleweight £110-115, a senior £150-60, a design director £170-80 and a creative director more still. The amount at which they are charged to the client has no impact upon their earning, making no difference by way of commission, bonuses or salary. But the transparency of the system of billable hours, and the measurement of the ‘effective’ use of those hours through the utilisation rate, makes obvious to individual designers the value of the hour they are working to the agency in its relationship with the client. Thus, in situations where the agency has over-pitched work to a prospective new client, or the contingency of the creative process expresses itself in other ways, such as the client making constant requests for amendments and so on, the reallocation of hours billed out at one level to a worker on a separate level is plain for that worker to see. Around this arise tensions and problems.

What Alvehus and Spicer call ‘internal markets’ within the firm can be exploited so that juniors could work hours billed as being worked by seniors. Due to the fact that there is often a very tenuous relationship between hours billed and hours worked, and

the general acceptance of this fact therein, there was an institutional tendency at the company they studied for seniors to delegate tasks to juniors. The task would be one supposed to have been performed by a senior, but would be worked at a cheaper rate than the senior would otherwise have charged. Furthermore, seniors 'seek to avoid doing the difficult tasks [...] which will often take longer than what they can bill for [...] and monopolise what they see as easy jobs [...] which will take a shorter amount of time than what they can bill.' Juniors, with their lower charge out rate and ability to be 'squeezed' by working non-billable hours as overtime, are thus exploited by seniors by having the hard tasks delegated to them to reduce the burden on the latter (2012, p.506).

The 'value' of the work here expresses an inequality based upon the hierarchical demarcation of roles between seniors and juniors, and the division of labour discussed earlier in the chapter between concept and execution (or 'form-giving'). In return for the assistance, the senior may share some of the hours billed with the junior (claimed as 'supervisory time'), which presents itself as an advantage to the junior on the basis of the competitive environment outlined above. Yet Alvehus and Spicer's study also evinces a reliance on the particular contractual status of juniors enabling the performance of non-billable hours as overtime. However, they assert that juniors are often more than willing to be subjected to being taken advantage of in this way, seeing it as a necessary step of getting on in their jobs (2012, p.506).

A common example of these processes in the case companies I studied in this research is the event whereby a junior designer ends up working hours passed to him or her as a result of the unavailability of the senior designer or creative director to whom they were initially allocated. At the business end of things, the managing director of Company 5 told me that, no matter who worked the hour, it would be shared out the same: 'Then you've got a complexity such as: if a junior designer does a piece of work, suppose the junior design is sick that day and you put a senior designer on it, do you put the junior's cost, or the senior's cost? It's very simple in my book- you put the senior's costing in it' (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014). The 'costing' of the hour constructs an abstract equivalence absent in concrete practice. But this is by no means indicative of a crisis, but rather its overcoming.

From the perspective of individual creatives, things look different. 'Sometimes you won't be on a project,' one told me, 'but then you'll be asked to come and participate, because there's so many hours built in for a designer or a senior, effectively you're taking those hours from them and using them towards you' (Author's Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014). One designer said he was probably 'pretty good value' for Company 8, as the cheapest member of staff but someone who had stepped in and taken on responsibilities at a higher level to compensate for the free-floating position of the freelance creative director, and within the context of an auspiciously 'non-hierarchical' company structure (Author's Interview with Designer, 33.9.M.D, 14/01/2015). The 'partners' would charge out to clients at twice the price of him, but could only commit themselves to strategy, and not to the practical design-based elements of a job. Only the designer could do this. That time spent handling clients is more valuable is not based, therefore, on a differentiation of skill. Rather, it is to do with one's role and the rate at which that is charged out to a client. If a partner handles clients, it is charged at the partner's rate. If he handles a client- which, on occasion, he had been tasked with doing in the past- then it would be charged out only at his hourly rate.

The transparency around these processes of valuation and allocation make clear to the individual creative the value of the hour they work as opposed to its value as represented nominally in their pay-package. But they also have an impact on the

intensity of the work they perform, and, as a result, the pleasure they take in it. Seniors are both of a higher value- at the salary and charging end- and factored into time budgets as being able to perform in three days what a junior can do in three (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 7.2.F.SD, 25/02/2014) or in one week what a junior can do in two (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 10.2.F.PO, 18/03/2014). This relates partly to a perceived level of skill, and partly to the content of the work with which a senior is typically tasked, relating less to composition and more to overarching conceptual or directive work with reference to the design process. The implication of the different assumptions around time made in these role divisions is that, should a junior designer be allocated hours charged out as to be worked by a senior, they also take on board the turnarounds expected on the particular component of the project they were expected to perform. With this comes an intensified work regime as the junior completes work on time that their competency would not automatically render them suited to- and for the same pay. Here the designer feels acutely the culture of contingency to which agencies are subject in their search for new clients by way of overpromising on projects and compliant conformity with the vagaries of client and consumer sentiment with a constant series of amends and last-minute changes. As agencies are forced to change their plans to keep work within budget and on time, the wider corporate context feeds into increased time pressure and an open, acknowledged deficit in the worth of a worker's work next to their wage. It impacts upon their sense of 'self-worth' to see others 'charged out at more than you are', despite working quicker and 'spend[ing] ten per cent, or two or three per cent of the time' a junior designer would on it, as one designer told me. 'It does make you go, well, what for these two or three hours on the project does he really add?' (Author's Interview with Designer, 26.4.M.D, 21/07/2014).

As one interviewee put it, the process of assigning tasks to juniors or seniors is really just 'allocating time' for the purposes of billing (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 7.2.F.SD, 25/02/2014). It need not necessarily be reflected in reality, as we have seen. But it wields an effect nonetheless. In the process of arbitrage, what the system of billable hours abstractly posits comes to reconstruct the concrete in its image. This is a key finding in support of a critique of the mooted crisis of measurability. As saw in Chapter 6, where postoperaists see concrete labour as an autonomous force capital desperately seeks to capture, it is in fact subservient to the latter, and tells us nothing alone.

9.6. Conclusion

Arbitrage, then, in tandem with the other processes covered in this chapter, is simply a response geared towards rationalising the 'other' activities that surround, permeate and make possible the core tasks of the project by pooling all the hours worked over the course of the day and then distributing them equally among all the different accounts one has been working with. This creates a hierarchy of different roles and the time in which they take place, around which a largely suppressed intra-agency conflict occurs. Although all these strategies are implemented chiefly to restrict the 'loss' of paid time on the part of the employee, there exists the considerable possibility of manipulation, especially when one is working an account held by a company relatively insensitive to the particular price they are eventually charged, for instance, or where the pitch has gone awry- as it frequently does owing to a number of factors in the current economic climate.

Just as Marx's capitalist sought to chip away here and there at the worker's free time on the basis that 'moments are the elements of profit', so too here employers themselves can add a minute here and there on a similar principle, although fed through different processes. The hours that are recorded seldom match that posited in the practice of the work they purport to represent. We will see in subsequent

chapters the role of the 'fiction' this constructs in making possible measurement in spite of conditions that apparently militate against it.

From this perspective the process of exploitative delegation found in arbitrage and the rationalisation around it, itself a result of the corporate motivations embedded in the creative context by the pitching and billing process, calls into question the very concept of an hour of a given kind of work having a certain value. As Alvehus and Spicer contend, this uncertainty entails 'processes of intricate accounting whereby employees will consider the value of their job, whether their charge out rate will allow them to complete it in time, and if not, whether it can be shifted to a more junior employee' (2012, p.506) Rather than neutral category then, the value of a billable hour is something marked by struggle and the mechanisms of hierarchy, power and ideology.

Yakura contends that 'assigning an economic value to time takes considerable effort' (2001, p.1092). Ultimately, the assignation of economic value to chunks of work time is not an easy process, but something which is subject to struggle on the part of both employer and employee. On the part of the capitalist the aim is to socially validate expended labour as a part of the total abstract social labour-time of society by means of the commensuration and exchange of commodities on the market. This struggle is waged in a tentative and piecemeal manner within the workplace, through processes like utilisation and arbitrage, before culminating in the sphere of exchange. Although anomalies and obstacles continually obstruct the valuation of work-time in the process of billing hours, as we shall see in the final chapter, measurability continues unabated.

10. MEASURING CREATIVE LABOUR

10.1. Introduction

This final chapter overviews the challenges confronting companies in the creative industries to enforce measurability in the creative labour process, and how they seek to overcome them. In many instances, conventionally routinized working practices can easily have an evaluation of their productivity made on the basis of averages and measurements which abstract a general overview from the concrete particularities of what goes on hour-by-hour. The formal way in which working tasks are structured in, say, factories, shops or call centres allows management to compare like-with-like. However, artistic and creative practices, Hesmondhalgh and Baker write, 'resist[] this abstractness' (2011, pp.83-84). This makes it very hard to assess the contribution they make. 'This causes a constant problem for capitalist businesses', they write. In response, there is a tendency for the rationalisation of cultural production, 'both at the creative stage and the circulation stage.' Creative management thus always 'struggl[es] against the relative autonomy given to creative workers'. The 'irrationality' and immeasurability of creative work, by means of a system of commodity exchange which brings everything into comparison with all other things, results in a tendency towards specialisation, standardisation, and rationalisation.

The theoretical perspective taken here suggests that what happens in the workplace becomes significant only by virtue of the form it assumes in the market- a form implicit but not fully realised in the labour process itself. Hence steps taken to render work more comparable and standardised, and to squeeze out that which defies its spontaneity, unpredictability- can only represent a down-payment on the commensuration necessary to commodity exchange. To be validated as a commodity, a product must sell, but it must also exchange, by means of money. To exchange it must be brought into a relation of equivalence with other products. The product and its process of production must possess sufficient comparability with other products. Put simply, it must be measurable and commensurable. Before something is measured, it cannot be commensurate. The measures introduced within production, therefore, are central and not incidental to capitalist valorisation. The unit of time, as we saw in Chapter 1, is central to attempts in this direction, recommending itself from an antagonistic social basis in the search for subsistence via the wage, parcelled out in hourly sums positing a notional value to expended labour thereafter,

In Chapter 1 we explored the reasons why time, despite the post-hoc abstraction of SNLT sitting at the centre of capitalist valorisation, functions as the crucial aspect capitalists extract from the chaos of reality to structure work in the sphere of production. Not only does the monitoring of time measure the ability to get goods and services to market in a timely manner, but steps taken to ensure measurability facilitate a greater degree of certainty in the comparability and commensurability essential to the possibility of exchange. There are many examples of how production is managed so as to guarantee commensurability. Industry benchmarks, professional standards and legal requirements all help establish homogeneity. Things are also organised and managed so as to give a sense of certainty as regards a product's success. Measurement is central to certainty: timesheets and performance indicators are key elements in this. As we shall see, billable hours are part of this technical fabric.

As we have seen, due to its reliance upon ephemeral and unquantifiable qualities such as creativity, communication and cognition, theorists of immaterial production including Hardt and Negri (2001) and Marazzi (2008) have suggested that this labour and the value that it creates are essentially immeasurable. They contend that this immeasurability is a contemporary occurrence, catalysing a crisis in capitalist valorisation. But what we see in the following is that the increasingly significant role

that the creative industries take with reference to the economy as a whole bring about changes in the way they organise work and respond to uncertainty. Creative industries themselves are among those most exposed to uncertainty due to their ephemerality and the essential 'unknowability' of creative products (Caves 2002). This means that they have to rationalise just like every other sphere of the capitalist economy. This brings with it particular contradictions, intricately linked to the responsibilities placed upon them by the significant position they take in the sale and exchange of commodities. It is the focus of this research upon these contradictions

10.2. Problems

The 'fundamental problem' facing attempts to measure creative labour and its products is, as one managing director told me, 'that they don't know what they're charging for' (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014). The question confronting creative agencies, from billing the client, quantifying company worth for mergers and acquisitions, down to the everyday practices of timesheeting and performance management on the shopfloor, is 'how do you capture this unquantifiable thing, this big idea?' The managing director compared it to the comparison between a genuine Rembrandt and a copy created by a fraudster. Told it was an original, he suggested, one would cite its worth as £8 million. But told it was a copy, the buyer would offer only £8. But, to all intents and purposes 'it's the same piece of work', but the impression of worth dictates what the recipient pays. He applied this the creative good or service in general: the quantification comes with the amount paid. As we shall see, in its own way, this clarifies the ultimate arbitration of value in exchange, and the determination of abstract labour not in expenditure of labour but expenditure of money as the positing of a relationship between commodities. The positing of value via money is the measure to which all activity in creative agencies defers, above and beyond the challenges of measurability confronted daily and the responses crafted to overcome them. Before considering the significance of this level of measure, we will deal with the latter two.

One of the most basic everyday problems of measurability employers and their employees face in creative workplaces is the way in which differently-performed hours of work-time withdraw from easy comparison as like-for-like amounts of the same labour content. As one piece of research on billable hours comments, '[t]he system hides the fact that units of time are not fungible. One hour of one consultant's time is certainly not equivalent to 1 hour of a different consultant's time. For that matter, 2 different hours of the same consultant's time is rarely equivalent' (Yakura, 2001, pp. 1092-3). Yet the practice of billable hours is founded upon the assumption of comparability. A considerable conceptual stretch is required on the part of those whose job it is to help this abstraction cohere from the concrete particularity of reality. It is the practice of comparing and measuring billable hours that brings value to them in the first place. The hours are both a commodity sold to the client and valued in this way, and contribute to the value of an end product exchanged as a commodity. In relation to the latter, billable hours mark a tentative, ideal temporary realisation of the abstraction of labour as socially commensurable, in line with that theorised in Chapters 1 and 2.

But the abstract framework of form they force upon the work's content conflicts with the lived experience and understanding of the latter. For the participants in Alvehus and Spicer's study, for instance, abstract clock time is consistently undermined by the concrete reality of the work that takes place, as it exceeds the reduction to this simplistic, ironed-out realm of pure quantity by incorporating multiple and simultaneous projects and tasks and other activities not reconcilable with the system of billable hours, falling outside possible outlets to charge for the time worked (2012, pp.501-502). Whereas one might simply claim for the five minutes spent on the phone

with the client, this does not take account of 'the two minutes it takes to bring out my time report, [...] the ten minutes it takes to open an account is the client isn't already there' and the time it takes to make a note of any advice given to the client so that it can be shared with superiors so that it can be reviewed (something that the superior will also accumulate billable hours working on) (2012, p.501). As such, the billable hours charged to clients do not simply represent the creative or cognitive processes which are generally taken to be the key value-generating aspect of the contracted work, but also the menial, administrative and bureaucratic practices that make this possible. Capturing the vagaries and contingencies of these practices under a clear cut 'hour' can be difficult.

Furthermore, the internal differentiation of a designer's time use over the course of a day makes an accurate estimation of time use difficult. Most participants in the study would be working on more than one project, each with its own job code against which to log hours, at any one time. Switching between these jobs, often in the form of phonecalls from clients, brief discussions with colleagues, and non-chargeable hours on ancillary tasks, made compiling an accurate record of time use impossible, with one interviewee suggesting that they could attain at best only 60 per cent accuracy in giving account of how they spent their time (Author's Interview with Junior Designer, 3.1.F.JD, 15/01/2014). In essence, they had no idea at all what time they had spent on which project, and, as we shall see later in the chapter, responded, like most designers, by reconstructing it from scratch, usually in line with whatever was initially billed out.

Other issues which make it difficult to ascertain what is going on, how long it takes and how much it is worth relate less to the internal organisation of time in the workplace than the nature of the creative task itself. The first is that the development of concepts, images or designs is rarely if ever measurable with reference to a clear state of completion. The 'deliverable' refers really to the results of a given period of time- hence the importance of the billable hours in structuring work in creative agencies- with the response to the creative brief- whether a logo, a brand, a communications style or so on and so forth- governed by the amount of time billed. But the time in which this creative plan is practically enacted is not always the same as the time billed. The lines between work and non-work are hazy and unclear. On one hand, 'no matter what you're working on there's always more work to do, it's never finished. You can always invest another couple of hours thinking about it' (Author's Interview with Designer, 30.6.M.D, 30/11/2014). In a situation, therefore, where companies encourage their staff to cut corners as far as possible to accrue a margin by working less hours than billed, the temptation for those implementing the creative brief is to take as much time as possible. The billed hours constrain this temptation, but the issue remains: that the counting of hours conflicts with the necessarily unfinished state of a creative work.

Secondly, the spontaneous rhythm by which this creative work comes about defies easy measurement on the basis of time. A creative director summed this up succinctly: 'You can come up with an idea very quickly on one project, but equally it might take a month on another project, so to define how long it takes up front and then deliver against that is really really quite tricky. And likewise on a project, you know, you might, the solution might come up and then, but then because you have, the hours are allocated, and you're working over, you've already got the idea [...].' (Author's Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014). Spontaneity conflicts in two ways with time measurement: firstly, by defying the format of creative production projected in the clean parsing of billable hour from billable hour; and secondly, by taking place outside the normal working hours of the creative. Spontaneity can strike inside the worker's normal hours, where, for instance, a

designer spends two days struggling to think up a concept but then an ‘idea happen[s] in five seconds’ when all of a sudden they ‘look at two different things’ together, one participant suggested (Author’s Interview with Designer, 1.1.M.D, 15/01/2014). Or, indeed, a designer can gain a very concrete understanding of the design they will later implement even during listening to the client give the creative brief- but then the company bills for a full course of concept development regardless. But this spontaneity realises itself also outside normal working hours, where a designer spends the day ‘reading about something, reading the brief, redefining the brief, setting out exactly what it is they’re asking for’, and then ‘it’s three o’clock in the morning and you wake up with the idea’, or ‘when you’re just chatting to someone down at the pub, or chatting with your partner in the evening’ the participant said. And, they told me, most people would not charge for that, and nor would the company or client sanction it.

On top of these aspects tied to the character of the creative’s work are other influences on the possibility of measurement that arise from the relationship with the client, a golden thread that links what goes on in these auspiciously artistic and intrinsically motivated work environments with the contingencies and uncertainties of capitalist profit-seeking and the vagaries of consumer sentiment and commodity circulation. In the first place, the posited value of a given project can be unclear for the reasons given earlier- that agencies pitch lower than they should to gain repeat work from a prestigious client, or the inscrutability of a client’s budgetary limits leading to a job being priced at the wrong level for the work entailed. In this context, agencies ‘have to make an educated guess as to how long *we predict* the work is going to take’, one production and operations manager said (Author’s Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 2.1.F.PO, 15/01/2014). Beyond the uncertainty that arises in this guesswork, however, further contingencies arise in the day-to-day relationship with the client. As the production and operations manager told me, ‘[t]here’s always an unknown factor that the client could change their mind’ at various points along the way. This is partly remedied by the common provision within the price quoted for two sets of amends, but different clients can still pose various difficulties despite this. Often agencies will not find themselves dealing with decision-makers directly, and, once a design has gone through the chain of command of a complex multinational company, communication can be adversely affected (Author’s Interview with Designer, 1.1.M.D, 15/01/2014), the burden of which falls squarely on the agency. Agencies find themselves in a subordinate position to clients, desperate, in competitive conditions, to retain them for future work. Their attempts to bend the ‘two amends’ rule to please them can result in working hours bursting out of the quantitative limits set in the billed amount.

What this suggests is that problems of measurability in the creative industries result not from any novel circumstance relating to change in working practices towards ‘immaterial labour’, as critiqued in Chapters 5 and 6, but rather relate to established features with which agencies are accustomed to dealing. Moreover, the context for problems of measurability connect with the corporate environment in which agencies must by necessity embed themselves to find outlets for the creativity of the designers and brand strategists they employ. Agencies are subservient to the unpredictable and contingent rhythms of the different kinds of capitalist enterprise with which they work, which impact, as contended in Chapter 8, via small scale phenomena like *volte faces* and changes along the client company hierarchy, and larger-scale economic imperatives, on the possibility of measurement within the creative workplace. What we see is the breakdown of billable hours as a stake within the competition between agency and client over that most precious of commodities, money. In this identifiable breach in the smooth quantitative surface appearance constructed in the billing process, that structures the practice of creative work, the antagonistic context in which

all production under capitalist takes place becomes clear. Competing interests at the money end bring the edifice of billable hours to a stuttering halt. As one designer explained, 'we want as many hours as possible, the client wants as little hours as possible, but then how that really affects the value of the end product, that kind of gets lost in the battle between what you both want' (Author's Interview with Designer, 25.4.M.D, 21/07/2014). The billable hours become a self-sustaining process, thrown into crisis only when the underbelly of actual human practice and production on which it is established intrudes upon the measure of value and time it posits, conceals and abstracts from. As Yakura writes of billable hours, '[w]hen the system breaks down for whatever reason, the arbitrary nature of the valuation process becomes apparent' (2001, pp.1092-3). Creative industries thus show measurability in a kind of crisis, but not of the kind theorists of immaterial labour identify, and not for the reasons they suggest. They rather feel acutely the conditions present in all forms of capitalist production and valorisation through time, situated at a pivotal point in the circulation of goods and services as commodities. The techniques and approaches to maintain the rule of measure of time and value in creative production thus always must work against this context. In the next sections, we will consider what steps are taken in the agencies studied to do this.

10.3. Timesheeting

In its own way, the system of billable hours represents a means by which creative labour, more defiant before traditional measurement than other kinds of work, can be quantified and compared in ways commensurate with capitalist production and valorisation as a whole. In order to be made valuable, time must be made quantifiable. As Alvehus and Spicer suggest (2012, p.501), billable hours transform 'the 'chaotic flow' of the working day into something quantifiable', translating incommensurable quality into equivalent quantity. One of the principal means by which this is effected in contexts where no easy temporal measure is given is through 'the flow of work-time being quantified and valued through the technology of billable hours'.

The budget of hours set at the billing stage is subject, as we have seen, to the conflicting motivations of client and agency, imbricated within a wider corporate context of contingency and competition described in Chapter 8. Making sure that this amount, arbitrated in the meeting of firms preoccupied not with time and products but predominantly with money, is conformed to thus presents itself as a problem for agencies. Systems of timesheeting are implemented in response to record the hours worked against the budget of the hours billed. As we shall see, in practice, this seldom if ever succeeds in producing an accurate representation of the hours worked, and instead betrays its origin in a nominal amount of hours that then creates a continuing illusion of conformity in the unpredictable and spontaneous creative tasks conducted thereafter.

Timesheets are important for creative agencies for internal and external reasons. Internally, timesheeting aids planning for future work, conforms with accountancy standards (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 4.1.M.SD, 15/01/2014), and allows agencies to gauge utilisation rates and act upon them, sometimes to the benefit of 'thousands of pounds here, thousands of pounds there' (Author's Interview with Designer, 6.2.M.D, 19/02/2014). Externally, as one managing director told me, it produces a paper trail that can be used to convince potential big clients of reputable and rigorous accountability practices, and also serve as evidence to sway potential buyers if the agency wishes to sell up to a big advertising or media conglomerate (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014).

Thus, timesheets are pivotal to the agency as a business and an object of value in a wider web of economic relations. The filling out of timesheets takes two forms. In

some cases, it is done as the designer works. In others, it is done retrospectively. Either way, the unit of time by which the work is broken down is usually the same. Previous case studies (Dorland, 2009, Alvehus and Spicer, 2012) suggest this is typically done in six-minute increments, although my findings suggest this varies considerably. For instance, one designer would record her work- typically by the hour- only to divide it into three minute increments at the end of the day (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 7.2.F.SD, 25/02/2014). Another was subject to a new timesheeting regime, which, at fifteen minute intervals recorded as he worked, seemed particularly arduous in the context of an agency where only the loosest track was kept of time previously (Author's Interview with Designer, 30.6.M.D, 30/11/2014).

The timesheeting process, however, is plagued with difficulties relating to the issues identified in the first section above. More often than not designers will record their hours retrospectively, at the end of the day, week or, longer-term, accounting for the last two or three weeks. One participant said that he'd usually 'go two weeks without doing [his] timesheets and then do it retrospectively' (Author's Interview with Middleweight Designer, 29.2.M.MD, 30/11/2014). Another told me that she had 'suffered the pain of thinking 'what did I do on the 2nd of January', when 'it's now the 28th' (Author's Interview with Junior Designer, 3.1.F.JD, 15/01/2014). Reconstructing and remembering what went before can be difficult owing to the internally diverse ways in which any hour is spent, and the blurred boundaries between one hour of creative labour and another. Depending on the character of the client and the project, this can be easier or harder in different circumstances. Where a designer is preoccupied with a bigger job, they will be more likely to spend longer chunks of time on one task. This was more common in the bigger agencies that had longstanding relationships with certain brands or brand groups, like Company 2, who were accustomed to working consistently in groups assigned to one or two clients in the FMCG sector. But where their time is made up of a patchwork of smaller projects for smaller clients, designers flit from phonecall to amend, sending out a proof sheet one minute, and liaising with a new client the next (Author's Interview with Designer, 1.1.M.D, 15/01/2014). This makes it hard to track in real-time or reconstruct retrospectively the usage of one's budget of billable hours.

Against these obstacles, agencies must implement disciplinary regimes to coerce designers to complete their timesheets in a timely manner, so as to gain as accurate a representation of how time is spent as possible. As agencies become more business-oriented in the increasingly competitive environment and uncertain economic climate detailed in Chapter 8, where the flows of commodity consumption on which they operate are constrained, the traditionally relaxed creative ethos of design and advertising is augmented by attempts at closer control of employees. One middleweight designer told me that, whilst when he first started he 'could sort of get away with not doing alot', 'now they chase you every week' for your timesheet. 'There's an email sent around with the usual suspects', he said, with a screenshot of the weekly time use data and a note saying 'this one's missing' (Author's Interview with Middleweight Designer, 29.2.M.MD, 30/11/2014)

However, attempts at chasing up timesheets are met with resistance from creative personnel. As one production and operations manager charged with the responsibility of chasing timesheets told me, '[e]verybody hates doing timesheets' (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 23.4.F.PO, 21/07/2014). It was, as a managing director said, 'an unsolved problem' (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014), to which the production and operations manager was seeking a solution.

In the search for a solution to the inscrutability of creative labour before systems of measurement and accountability, a range of technologies and software have sprung

up in the professional services sector. They pose a panacea to the problems of recording time use and chasing timesheets by human employees, and outsource it to automated frameworks that bring with them their own logics of control and discipline. However, as we shall see, they too come face-to-face with the difficulties of measurement in creative labour, and the resistant sensibilities of creative workers subjected to the rhythms of corporate life.

10.4. Technology

Although some companies in the study used paper timesheets, employees at most agencies were responsible for inserting data into a web-based, networked time-monitoring program. Two main brands of time-tracking software were used by the agencies I studied. Program 1 is used by over 1000 companies in the creative industries and professional services. Program 6 is used by over 40,000 business worldwide. Company 2, meanwhile, had its own bespoke system, Program 4, specifically designed for ease of use so that 'people [don't] spend ages doing timesheets' (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 9.2.F.SD, 18/03/2014). Most such programs fulfil a function somewhere between project and workflow management, account keeping and time tracking. The extent to which these are rolled into one for most agencies indicates the weight with which all other aspects of the business rest on the fine line between time worked and time billed.

The technologies used to perform these practices of audit and measurement are highly significant. Whilst one should be careful not to fall into a kind of technological determinism that sees these programs driving processes of measurement, rather than being subject to a wider social drive to measure, quantify, abstract and value, there is something to be said for the way in which these programs make possible the intensification and extension of already existing social conditions in this direction. Importantly, they allow, as Julier and Moor (2009, p.269) assert, 'creative work to be more easily broken down into particular stages' and for these stages, and those contributing to them, to be more easily compared, codified, commensurated and valued. Any inquiry into billable hours in these sectors, therefore, cannot ignore the important role played by these technologies.

Monitoring the work of designers, breaking it up into 'ever-smaller' and more easily measurable and auditable 'components of [...] time' (Moor and Julier 2009., p.10), these technologies typically work as follows. An account is assigned to each client project, and then the hours worked are entered into this account at the individual discretion of those working them. The designer selects the project from a list of potentially hundreds of open internal and external jobs, and then documents the time spent on the project, also providing a written account of the activities carried out in the allotted time and allocating these activities into the various pro-forma subcategories available on the program. As Alvehus and Spicer note (2012, p.501), in this system, an hour registered is assumed to perfectly represent an hour worked.

Within this common structure, the temporal relationship to this recording of worked time can take one of three forms. In the first, time is tracked as the worker works. As a production and operations manager at Company 4 explained, Program 6 operates like this. It provides workers with 'a little app, so when you start a project you turn the app on, and when you go and have lunch you stop it, and when you come back you start it again' (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 23.4.F.PO, 21/07/2014). However, this poses problems when workers are not engaged on one project for a longer period of time. Here, a second kind of time-tracking steps in, whereby time is recorded retrospectively. Program 4, custom-built for Company 2, works this way. Designers upload their timesheets onto the system at the end of the week- or, indeed, sometimes later. The monitoring here, then, takes

place retrospectively, at the end of the project, rather than as it proceeds. An employee from the client services team at Company 2 described it as the '*brain* of the company, all the projects are on there, all the budget sheets get uploaded onto there, and all the overviews and billable hours get put on there aswell so this is really like the brain, the main system' (Author's Interview with Account Handler, 5.2.M.CS, 19/02/2014). But this brings about the inevitable problems encountered in timesheets themselves- that they are not completed scrupulously enough and in a timely enough manner- that the imposition of the technology initial seeks to solve. Thus, the software solutions to the 'unsolved problem' of timesheets both lack flexibility- like Program 6- and have an excess of it- like Program 4. In response, as we shall see, agencies must resort to human forms of control to augment technology, which cannot stand as the self-sufficient, game-changing intervention its proponents intend it to be.

The intentions that undergird the imposition of technological solutions to the 'unsolved problem' of timesheeting work along four attributes identified by Moor and Julier (2009): control, data, profitability and quantification.

Firstly, they provide a capacity for the surveillance and control of workers' activities, 'allow[ing] for the almost constant monitoring of both designers and projects' (Julier and Moor, 2009, p.263). Written into the software used at the case study companies in my research were features that forced workers to complete their timesheets. One sent out a reminder 'every Friday afternoon around 4pm' (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 23.4.F.PO, 21/07/2014). Another would prevent the employee from logging on to their computer in the morning if they had not completed their timesheet at the end of the day before (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014). These punitive measures produce data that can then be used to monitor how well designers are meeting their hours collectively and individually. As one productions and operations manager, in charge of chasing timesheets and monitoring time use, said,

at the end of every day the designers pump into the computer system the job number and how much time they've spent on each job, and then I can go in at any time and check how much time has been spent on each individual project, by who and when. And that enables us to keep a good idea of how much time has been spent to how much time has been quoted (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 2.1.F.PO, 15/01/2014).

The disciplinary effect of the technology used at the latter firm was such that workers faced constant pressure to make the full forty hours of their week billable, and, if they didn't, 'conversations start happening'.

The monitoring involved in the first function 'generate[s] new forms of data' of which we may identify two kinds. The first is data that is *publicised*. This data 'keep[s] information about the status of project work on open access' available to clients and collaborators. The second is data that is *privatised*. This data 'restrict[s] information to management only' (Julier and Moor, 2009, p.263). In this way, the technologies help agencies conform to the criteria good record-keeping demanded by a public and private sector drive towards accountability. This matters not only to client companies and their requirements to see details of company accounts and procedures, but also to potential buyers of the company in event it should be sold on or subject to the mergers and acquisitions with which large global media and advertising conglomerates gain a monopoly position in the circulation of brands and images (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014).

Thirdly, these technologies 'provid[e] new means for connecting workers' efforts to the profitability of the organization' (Moor and Julier, 2009, p.10). Software like Programs 1 and 6 'facilitate[s] much more detailed analyses than were previously

possible of the profitability of particular clients and projects, and allow[s] a similar logic to be applied to the contributions of individual staff members' (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 23.4.F.PO, 21/07/2014). One program popular with advertising agencies- 'a beast of a machine'- would issue an alert to the CEO himself if the project was shown to be going over budget and running the risk of turning no profit. The program used at Company 1 allows them, at the culmination of a job, to 'get charts of how much time was spent in client meetings, how much time was spent just managing the project, how much time was spent designing it, artworking it' (Author's Interview with Designer, 1.1.M.D, 15/01/2014). This then allows them to ascertain the Gross Profit Average for a given job, and trace patterns for certain clients that enables them to determine whether the client is profitable enough to continue working with. As a production and operations manager informed me, 'once the entire job has been completed finance do an overall gross profit report which is they'll put in the job number the gross profit that was predicted and the gross profit that was achieved. So we can see ones that are overachieving and ones that are underachieving. And the ones that are underachieving we'll look closely to see where they went wrong' (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 2.1.F.PO, 15/01/2014). In the context of the struggle between the two for control over the means and measures of creative practice, this data thus grants some power to agencies to be more judicious in selecting clients with which they seek to work.

Fourthly, they facilitate the aforementioned ability to quantify value and attribute it to the various parts of and actors involved in the production process. This should be seen in the context of the demands of clients for such measures of cost, which can then be channelled into indications of possible value generation at their end. In this way, it is not only the design agency that attributes and quantifies value through the mechanism of the monitoring software, but the client company as well (Moor and Julier, 2009, p.10). Moreover, as the production and operations manager at Company 1 noted, the data rendered via time-tracking software produces quantitative proof of an agency's capacity to 'deliver a large project on time' that 'you can then use that as a case study and a basis to promote yourself for other work' (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 2.1.F.PO, 15/01/2014).

In performing these four functions, Moor and Julier suggest, the technology represented in Programs 1 and 6 not only reflects the pre-existing social conditions of the capitalistic drive to measure and to value, but 'also shape[s] it'. They not only make possible the formalisation and codification of existing information such as billable hours and so on, but, crucially, enable to *creation* of new kinds of information, what Power (quoted in Julier and Moor 2009, p.263) calls new 'organizational facts' that take on an efficacy and agency of their own within the workplace and its functioning.

But their ability to effect change is constrained by the concrete social relations in which they insert themselves, giving the lie to the faith that technology itself has the potential to change the way we work, which is implicit in the Fragment-thinking surveyed and critiqued in Chapter 5. Just as agencies run up against timesheets as a problem when the latter are subjected to the struggle to abstract from creative doing to establish premonitory glances of socially necessary labour time, so too is that posed as a solution to the antagonistic context in which this struggle proceeds- in other words, the technological apparatuses of measurement represented in the software employed by agencies to track, monitor and assess creative labour. Just as timesheets are resisted by workers, so too are the technologies brought into to reinforce them.

The technology implemented faces limitations in its professed ability to guarantee an accurate record of time worked, but moreover wields a negative effect upon the very

creative processes upon which the industry relies. This relates in part to the fact that 'the systems are cumbersome and annoying and you have to log on them, and so it's the last you want to do, actually, as you're walking out of the door' (Author's Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014). A designer at Company 1 rued how

we have to type out every job number, if you've designed it or there's a meeting, how many hours, make sure it's on the right date, it's not as simple as like, you know, start your day, press start, it knows what job you're working on, you've got to take time out of your day to fill it all out (Author's Interview with Junior Designer, 3.1.F.JD, 15/01/2014).

But, more broadly, and importantly for the present study, the imposition of technological solutions to the timesheeting problem erodes the kind of creative commitment and energy necessary to generate the ideas, concepts and designs on which agencies depend for profit. This runs counter to the scenario on which the Fragment-thinkers encountered in Chapter 5 hang their hopes, whereby technology and human creativity work in autonomous and harmonious syncopation.

A good example is Company 8, which employed a Studio Manager and overhauled the time-recording regime to keep things in check, temporally and monetarily. Time-tracking software was installed that times designers as they worked. Completely automatic, there was no need to fill out timesheets retrospectively. Despite management's protestations that the intention was not to monitor how much work was being done, the participant described the imposition of this technology as a 'rupture point' that ruled out the 'comfort' they had to do 'more interesting work' within the confines of a project (Author's Interview with Designer, 32.8.M.D, 14/01/2015). Whereas previously, the company had billed on the basis of a fixed fee for the work, now this became translated into billing with time in mind, with an attendant effect on the structure and experience of work internally. 'I spent a year there completely demoralised about the time I was working, the money I was being paid and the control I had', said the participant employed there. It was profit-driven business model. The calculative mechanisms introduced by this software begin to exhaust that which the creative industries need the most: human input governed by some sense of vocation or intrinsic motivation around the expenditure of a constrained creative urge.

The technology tested the commitment at the centre of this association, to the extent that the aim- the timely completion of timesheets- was impeded. One designer at Company 1 said that the unrecorded hours would 'build up and up and up and up to the point that I've got a month's worth of time I've got to cram in [to the program] in a spare afternoon' (Author's Interview with Junior Designer, 3.1.F.JD, 15/01/2014). She expressed 'hate' for Program 1. The production and operations manager at Company 4 said that 'everyone hates' the reminder they get from Program 6 every Friday at 4pm (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 23.4.F.PO, 21/07/2014). This suggests there is an irreducibility of the human in creative labour that cannot be infringed too far. To a great extent, the creative doing of those involved must be sublated in the forms of measure to which their concrete activity is subject, but this must be kept within limits lest it contradict itself. Technology runs the risk of obliterating the creative motivation that agencies exploit. Thus, other means were found in the agencies I studied to make the processes of practical abstraction and measurement run to plan. And, frequently, these took the form of fairly traditional direct human routines of coercion and control that would not have seemed out of place to the fifties factory worker, locked in battle with a clipboard-wielding time-and-motion man. In the next section, we will explore how the limitations of automation and technological change conceal the constant presence of a direct discipline unmediated in lived experience but sublated in the abstract forms of mediation and measure it helps to cohere.

10.5. Practice

In their study of billable hours in a professional service firm, Alvehus and Spicer (2012, pp.501-502) suggest that billable hours function as a means of control internalised by those subject. By means of their recording of billable hours, workers are asked to conform to a clear conception of the 'clock time' of the capitalist workplace. Because billable hours present the chief means for prosperity and career progression to the participants, they strive to make every hour of the day billable. This coincides ideally with the company's own financial interest in the maximum possible number of hours being 'utilised' as billable and thus charged to clients for a potentially profitable return. This governmental control proceeds through the financialisation of employee's working lives by introducing logics of investment, budgeting, measurement and monetary value to every minute of the time in which they labour, as well as the kind of close monitoring of value creation and contribution made possible by technological instruments. These processes Alvehus and Spicer label those of 'financialized control' (2012, p.498). The financialised nature of this control consists in the way in which it links the most everyday aspects of the work performed to the overarching logic of profitability, company value, cost margins, time utilisation and so on, inculcating this logic within the sensibilities of the workers themselves (2012, pp.504-505).

But the evidence collected in my case studies suggests that the Foucauldian overtones of this account, focused on the governmentality of the employee relationship with measurement, elide the contestation and contingency to which it is subject. On one hand, the sensibilities of the workers are not co-opted, but in revolt. And secondly, a struggle is waged by the agency to enforce the practical abstraction of socially necessary labour time through billable hours. We have already seen that technology cannot accomplish the total control it promises. The processes of abstraction it enacts are dynamic because based in practice, and cannot fully sublate the concrete activities they work upon.

A Foucauldian analysis of governmentality, such as that Alvehus and Spicer apply to the system of billable hours, elides this dynamism. Foucauldian accounts see only the compliance of workers before panoptic power. But, as Woodcock (2013) argues in the context of call centre work²⁴, this dynamism must always contend with contingency and resistance. It must constantly renew itself in the face of this dynamic context. And, against the preoccupation of Foucauldian accounts, technology is not enough alone. 'Management', Woodcock writes, 'requires [a] human component.' Decisions must be made and acted on. As E.P. Thompson writes, 'it is by practice that production is sustained' (1978, p.290). Against the Foucauldian approach, here production must be *sustained* through the implementation of employer strategies. This is struggled for. Technology is not everything. Indeed, it is nothing without the social relations that circumscribe it. Focusing on human practice allows contingency to become clear: not only the contingency and uncertainty capitalists face and respond to, but the contingency that makes resistance possible. Capitalists must act because the messy unruliness of humanity can never quite be tamed. As Woodcock (2013) writes in his account of call-centre work, the '[c]oncrete experience' of employer tactics like electronic supervision reveals their power to be 'far from total'. Because every tactic 'requires human interaction', space is left for 'potential resistance'.

Undermining the account of billable hours as an automatically and absolutely accomplished form of governmental control, in the next section I explore the relationship between control and resistance as it occurs where agencies resort to human intervention in processes of measurement where, first, timesheeting presents

²⁴ This paragraph repeats formulations and ideas developed elsewhere in Pitts 2016e

itself as a problem, and then, in response to the first problem, technology steps forward as a solution bearing problems of its own. The new forms of control instituted in response to the uphill struggle to measure bring about a further development of antagonisms in creative labour. As we will see, the resolution of the attempt to measure is ultimately deferred and outsourced to the market relation itself. But, before this can be established, a struggle between human actors at different levels of company hierarchies ensues to enforce the rule of the billable hour. But we see this, too, unresolved in precisely the same manner as the 'unsolved problem' of the timesheet and the technological solutions offered by various software. And so the contradictions are resolved- in a sublated way- at a higher form of mediation in the market via money. But, before we can establish the grounds for this, we must encounter the lived experience of how companies stage practical interventions within the workplace to help the abstraction cohere.

10.6. Control

At Company 4, Program 6 sends out a reminder to workers every Friday afternoon at 4pm, but it is largely ignored. The automated email is easy to put to one side. The production and operations manager still has to 'police' the filling in of timesheets after this, doing the rounds in person or sending an email saying 'seriously guys, get your timesheet in' at 'six or six thirty'. And then, on Monday morning at the weekly production meeting, there will usually be outstanding timesheets to submit, at which point she'll 'say it again' (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 23.4.F.PO, 21/07/2014).

Contrary to the reversed class perspective of the operaist account of capitalist development assayed in Chapter 4, this shows that the unruliness of workers here does not invite the imposition of new technology, but the augmentation of it with human input. In a relational, communicative environment, the human side of things needs nurturing and reinforcing. Despite suggestions that even the activities of some conceptual workers like brand strategists and designers could someday be automated, albeit to a limited degree (see Bakhshi, Frey, Osborne, 2015), what the study shows is that, whilst this is feasible, it is limited by the social relations under which technology is implemented- a limitation, coincidentally, ignored in technoutopian political prescriptions derived from ideas critiqued in this thesis, reflected on further in the Conclusion.

Human input is vital in maintaining the processes of practical abstraction that make measurement possible in the creative industries. As a managing director at Company 5 noted, 'designers by definition are quite emotive people so they take more management than a firm of accountants' (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014). Where automatised procedures of measurement may be suitable for the latter, they are not necessarily so for the former. In small agencies- as many of those incorporated in this study were, even where attached to a larger firm- the ability to man-manage is more achievable. As one designer told me, a level of intensified control unattainable at larger companies is made possible: 'because there's not so many people in our office they'll have a general log of whether people are on time like all the time, half the time, whatever' (Author's Interview with Designer, 6.2.M.D, 19/02/2014). Further conditions are set for the imposition of more intensified forms of control by the corporate context in which agencies find themselves. The pressures of competition and spiralling urban rent and business rates hit Company 6 to such an extent that they were forced to impose new time monitoring regimes not through expensive new technology but through more direct forms of observation (Author's Interview with Designer, 30.6.M.D, 30/11/2014).

The character of this control varies according to the initial discretion awarded designers in how they use the budget of billable hours allocated to them. In most firms, designers will be told by the production and operations manager how many hours they have to work on different projects at the commencement of a given day or week. This might come in the form of a number of hours, such as Company 1, or a percentage of their total time attached to different clients, such as at Company 3. At Company 2, however, designers are more likely told the tasks they must complete, and around that work in the most efficient manner possible. Each of these examples imply different intensities of control. In the first two, creatives will typically work to whatever hours initially set out- or at least record these on their timesheet. In the last, more pressure may be placed upon individual creatives to conform to initial expectations held by management but not always transparent to individual designers.

Indeed, at Company 2 there had been a recent step change in the degree of monitoring to which workers were subject. A 'lady in finance', explained a senior designer at the same firm, now 'keeps score of everybody's billable hours' and gives 'lessons' in how to fill in timesheets efficiently (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 7.2.F.SD, 25/02/2014). What differentiated Company 2 from other examples was that the responsibility of 'chasing up' timesheets was the preserve of the finance department (Author's Interview with Account Handler, 5.2.M.CS, 19/02/2014). The biggest company I studied, it had a more financialised structure that translated, in the lived experience of creative work by those doing it, pressure at the time end seamlessly into pressure at the money end of company life. Indeed, it was the only company with a formal 'finance' department.

More generally, timesheet discipline was 'literally [...] *drummed* into' workers at the firms studied on a continuous and everyday basis (Author's Interview with Junior Designer, 3.1.F.JD, 15/01/2014). If an employee at Company 1 ran over the time they were allocated on a particular job at the beginning of the day, the production and operations manager would be 'on your case'. The latter therefore enforced the logic of the utilisation rate, linking time to money. In some firms, this took the form of loose targets to which workers were expected to subscribe. However, employees at other firms suggested that these individualised metrics made possible by technological observation, and maintained by human input from managers and other staff, were ultimately unenforced as a disciplinary measure. A strategist at Company 3 told me that the targets for utilisation tied to each individual would not be used in judging the individual's performance at year end (Author's Interview with Strategist, 8.3.F.S, 26/02/2014). A designer may be expected, she said, to make 80 per cent of their time billable, and meet 'only sixty-seven per cent', but this would necessarily arbitrate whether the individual was deemed successful or not. If they were producing good work, for instance, they would generally be considered to contribute positively to the company's portfolio. Even if this did not tally with the quantitative criteria the company was expected to meet on a *collective* level, the individual was only one part of this, the shortfalls of which on the company balance sheet would be made up by those who came in well under budget elsewhere.

Ultimately, here, the solution to the problem of technology, which itself is a solution to the problem of timesheeting, is revealed to have problems of its own. Where human input is introduced to maintain the rule of the billable hour, its capacity to exert control is broken down by a competing tendency to the abstract compulsion to render all activities measurable and commensurate. This is that, despite their imbrication in a corporate context that functions by constraining that upon which it relies, creative agencies exist as the sum of the sublated desire of their workers to engage in free creative doing. The creative actors to whom the responsibility to control and discipline- and thus stifle- this activity is delegated are double agents, unable to commit to the

same quantitative standards they must apply. The arbitration of billable hours, and the subjection of creative labour to the practical abstraction they help effect, must thus lie elsewhere.

10.7. Fiction

The wider question of what creativity is *worth* that we addressed at the beginning of this section is a rhetorical device used often by designers in the sector, and seldom by those involved in answering it at the company level. In the process of billing a job, the question is answered very simply by those who run agencies, and the clients to which they render services. Creativity's ephemerality, its indeterminacy, its apparent immeasurability: none are fatal to the positing of its value. Its value is what a client is prepared to pay for it. At Company 1, for instance, in the view of the managing director, creativity is 'worth x amount for an hour, that's what we sell it at, this is what it's worth to us, so there's what it's worth to us, that's what it's worth to them, take that off that, put that on that, that's your profit- that's how it works here' (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 4.1.M.SD, 15/01/2014). Thus the value is posited monetarily- that the time over which a billed job is worked has aspects which make it hard to measure by no means compromise the positing of that value. Indeed, the work is structured by the positing of the value, in conformity with the process of practical abstraction around which production and valorisation relate. The managing director at Company 1 determines that the value set in the meeting of agency and client is the value, and 'he sticks to that value, so if it's a hundred pounds for a job, then [the client] get[s] that job for a hundred pounds', and, with the profit priced in (recall, Company 1 functions on the basis of a 'Gross Profit Average' where profit is not chased but already written in), the task is then to 'make sure that it is as good as possible for the client' (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 4.1.M.SD, 15/01/2014). But with this comes a lack of 'breathing space', with no 'room to flex' or to 'sneak an extra half an hour in'. The positing of the value is not a reflection of the labour expended, but rather determines the form taken by the labour. And, as we shall see, the way in which it is measured.

No matter what the content of those hours, the forms through which the hours are measured come to tell the whole story, true or not. The rhythm of agency life is structured by a largely fictional relationship to the system of billable hours. Here, hours are recorded in line with budgets of time allocated to certain projects. The hours recorded on a day-by-day basis by the formal employees and freelancers involved rarely match the reality of how time passes. The agency needs to see its hourly pay well spent. In this way, paying by the hour rather than for, say, the product or the end result, skews the whole process. The working of an hour, abstracted from its concrete contents, becomes the aim. The form of the bill structures the expectations in ways that would not seem to assist the overall creative endeavour.

What the rhythm analytical method outlined in Chapter 3 suggests is that the temporal basis upon which work effort is measured is out of step with the underlying creative task. In the most absurd instances, possessed of a budget to work a certain number of hours on a project, a designer will complete the work, and sit and watch as unfilled time passes to match up to the number of hours billed. As one interviewee asserts, designers appear to end up being paid for hours- quantity- rather than quality (Author's Interview with Designer, 16.FL.M.D, 11/06/2014), although, in actuality, they are subject to the ruthless dialectic mediation of one in the other, to the extent of one side's active negation- a forgotten concreteness the experience of which is denied the worker.

The importance of forgetting and remembrance to the processes of quantification and measurement under examination was made apparent in participant interviews. When

talking of how they accounted for the time that they had spent working on a particular job, the participants often mentioned having to retrospectively generate timesheets that grouped tasks into two or three hour chunks, where the reality was rather one whereby these hours were internally significantly differentiated by the individual's attention turning to other responsibilities, receiving phone calls connected to other contracted work and so on. It was necessary to forget these contingent and irreconcilable elements in order to make the process of abstraction and measurement function smoothly. Indeed, at some workplaces I researched, the billable hours recorded are openly fictitious as a matter of course, reflecting only the original number quoted rather than those worked. This seeming contradiction actually exposes the 'truly false' character of billable hours, in that billable hours are themselves founded on an abstraction from reality.

This 'true falseness' is exposed in the appearances taken by the world of objective economic forms with which the designer must work. The worker experiences time pass differently than the agency as an organisation. As one participant highlights, eight hours will be eight hours to an agency, whereas for him it will be internally differentiated, varied, diverse (Author's Interview with Designer, 16.FL.M.D, 11/06/2014). The lived rhythm of the work undermines the smooth, quantitative appearance taken by the recorded time- which is an expression of the abstract, standardised time of business, in this case represented by the client. But, ultimately, this abstract, standardised time wins out. It structures the designer's work as long as the condition of possibility of that work- its payment- is under the auspices of quantity-time, hours- and not quality- the end result.

This circulates around a largely fictional relationship between timesheets and time served. Some companies actively encouraged what I will call the 'fiction' approach, whereby the hours recorded reflected only the hours billed and not those expended. Others encouraged a scrupulous 'non-fiction' approach, where workers were tasked with recording every hour they worked, in spite of any targets relating to the number of hours billed. However, the latter, as we shall see, lapses frequently into the former, especially in conditions where the work is particularly creative in nature or flexible in format. This poses a *problem* of measurability, but not the debilitating crisis described by theorists of immaterial labour (see Chapter 6). Rather, in line with Chapter 1, the 'fiction' that relates what goes on in the work place to its social validation in the marks fully retains the only measure that matters: that of money.

It is worth beginning with the latter, non-fiction approach, to demonstrate how the line between non-fiction and fiction blurs even where the company has set about chasing the former in good faith. The non-fiction approach brings with it certain disciplinary pressures, as well as greater pastoral oversight to prevent long working hours. Where profit is priced into the hours billed, at Company 1, one junior designer was 'getting shouted at' for not recording the exact timings of different tasks attached to different jobs (Author's Interview with Junior Designer, 3.1.F.JD, 15/01/2014). A production and operations manager at Company 2 was at pains to counsel the designers she supervised that, 'if you work more than eight hours a day, then *log it*' (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 10.2.F.PO, 18/03/2014). The attempt to gain an accurate picture of how time is used did not impact upon the pricing or billing of the work, but rather the agency's internal accounting and ability to predict the resources needed for future jobs. A senior designer at Company 2 explained how this pressure extended to accounting for the time it takes to have an idea whilst in the shower:

some people are kind of like 'ooh, I kind of used nine hours but they might think that I'm not quick enough or something, so I'll just write seven and a half like I should do on a normal day', um, and then, you know, on paper it looks like 'oh,

you've done it in the right times today', and they're happy, but the next time we come to look at the budget for the project, we're like 'time, lost time, she did this in seven and a half hours, that's great' [...]. So we always say every hour that you work you should just put it on the project. [I]t's creativity, so like you say, sometimes you're in the shower and like 'this is it, I've been searching all day for this'. (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 7.2.F.SD, 25/02/2014)

The 'non-fiction' approach confers certain advantages. By recording all hours, and assuming a standard 9-5 working day in the billing out of work to clients, an upper limit is placed on the working day, an overtime served in excess of which would result in 'the company [...] losing money', as one designer explained (Author's Interview with Designer, 33.9.M.D, 14/01/2015). In this respect, the spendthrift concern with hours induces some companies to care about how long their employees work into the evening- although it is fair to say this was more of a trend at the Dutch arm of Company 2 rather than its UK arm. 'Whereas [...] in London they would just take it for granted that you were working late', one senior designer told me, in Amsterdam, they would constantly enquire about the reasons that a designer would be working late (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 9.2.F.SD, 18/03/2014). But the real reason for this apparently honest concern with sufficient 'support', the designer suggested, is so that more hours could be booked for similar jobs. In this way, the generation of a caring environment is purely coincidental to the organisation of work towards the most rational and resourceful route to profit.

The non-fiction approach, however, faces considerable barriers to its successful operation. By insisting on telling the truth about the 'time taken' (see Chapter 1 on SNLT), it contradictorily contravenes not only the rhythms and regimes of workplace life, but also the socially valid account of the 'time taken' constructed in through the system of billable hours, which imposes a measure linked to the market upon the work that takes place. One managing director stressed the importance placed upon recording 'real hours' for internal company accounting (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014). This allows them to gauge how much a job costs the company. But the value of a job is arbitrated differently. The 'reality' to which the managing director subscribes does not capture the significance the commodified creative goods and services produced by the company assume in the market- which, is to say, their value as an expression of their socially-mediated relationship with all the other commodities of society- and the pivotal role taken by the results of this production, as suggested in Chapter 7, within the circuit of capital as a whole. In this sense, as we shall see, fiction is truer than fact.

Relatedly, the non-fiction approach to timesheeting runs up against the flexible work cultures found at creative agencies, and the intermittent and spontaneous rhythm of creative production. At Company 5, workers were forced to record hours they'd spent working at home or in the office at evening and weekends, even if they were not contracted to do so (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014). Whilst this would allow the company to gauge the true time a job took so as to better plan for future work, by foreclosing the option of expending hours in one's own time, on the rhythm-analytical level (see Chapter 3), it contravened the creative rhythms of those completing the work. Indeed, paradoxically, this leads to a situation where the hours recorded do not reflect the work completed. It induces designers to account for the time they are contracted to work- a normal 9-5, say- whilst not capturing the time within this that they were engaged in direct creative work. By seeing overtime as something to be scrupulously accounted for, making up for lost hours with extra effort was discouraged. As a creative director at Company 2 told me, the 'truthful' recording of hours is not a 'good way of measuring, because actually we don't honestly record hours directly at all, because people are very scared of overworking a project and therefore they'll only record seven and a half hours a day',

averse to admitting they spent longer on the job than intended (Author's Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014).

Thus agencies, in chasing what the managing director of Company 5 called 'a true representation', wage a struggle to prevent workers recording what he characterised as 'my truth', the individual self-perception of what one has worked (Author's Interview with Managing Director, 27.5.M.M, 28/11/2014). He described this as a 'psychological problem that negates our mechanics of timesheeting'. This leads to confrontations between competing rhythms of creativity and capital, as explained by a senior designer at Company 2:

They were noticing that I was putting 7.5 hours down a lot on certain days, so that means me estimating that I was leaving at half-five and doing like nine-to-five solid doing all the hours. And because they were noticing that, that a lot of people were doing that because they weren't maybe keeping on top of their hours every day, so when they looked back on their timesheets and they're were like 'oh yeah, I was working on that that day, full day, 7.5', when actually they may have worked longer, and they want to know if you're working longer. So they were noticing that I was staying in the studio longer than half-five, but was putting down 7.5 a lot on my timesheets and my creative director asked me why my, she told me that they'd noticed it and I should be putting down my hours correctly, and for me I always do...[M]aybe you're just feeling a bit tired that day and I think, well, I know I couldn't really work as intensely as normal, so although I stayed to half-six I'm only going to put seven and a half hours because that's how much I know I kind of worked. [*But they want you to put 8.5?*] Yeah, they would, but I don't because I think, I know, if that was up to me that I chilled out, that I had a coffee and looked at Pinterest. Sometimes you need just to be a bit more relaxed in the way that you're working.' (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 9.2.F.SD, 18/03/2014)

Thus there is a battle between two competing and necessary partial accounts of what is the true time and value of the work that takes place, guided by the position of different workers at different stages of the company hierarchy and the particular compulsions that attend them. The concrete experience of how work proceeds for the worker is abstracted from in the forms of measure to which it is subject, and the creative doing represented in the former sublated in the latter. This antagonistic relation is mediated in the formally non-hierarchical and intrinsically motivated company cultures at the agencies studied, but it remains all the same, played out in as simple a practice as timesheeting.

The resistant rhythms with which the process of time measurement must contend force it to shift from non-fiction to fiction. With one truth posed against another, there is a dialectic between non-fiction and fiction in which the best intentions to conform to the first pass over into a propensity to the latter. This is seen most concretely in the midway approach that results from companies auspiciously committed to recording hours truthfully meeting the need to represent things differently in order to conform with the parameters set out in the initial amount of hours billed for a project. For instance, Company 2 and Company 7 had processes in place whereby hours worked on one job would be recorded as worked on another to maintain the impression of profitability. This could either be carried out retrospectively by an account handler (Author's Interview with Account Handler, 28.2.F.CS, 30/11/2014) or by the designer themselves (Author's Interview with Designer, 31.7.M.D, 14/01/2015), by entering the hours against a different job code on the time-tracking software. Thus, the time as recorded might represent reality to begin with, but is filtered through the expectations of the 'time taken' established in the initial contract with the client. The amount initially billed structures everything thereafter, and the only 'reality' here is constructed by the contract and not the performance of the work it recruits. The latter is made recognisable and socially valid only in subservience to the forms of measure implied

by monetary value posited at the commencement of production, pointing outward to its mediation in market exchange.

Some companies dispense with such middle-way options altogether, throwing themselves fully into the fiction that what is worked reflects precisely what is initially billed. An element of fiction is pervasive in all timesheeting- 'a lie' even at the budgeting stage, said one designer (Author's Interview with Designer, 25.4.M.D, 21/07/2014). Seldom can a designer remember what they did at the beginning of the week, let alone the month. As an employee of Company 2 noted, '[Y]ou'll work two hours on one project and a couple of hours on that, and at the end of the day it is a little bit of guesswork to say, to be honest with that, but I mean you, you have a general idea of course. [T]he problem is at the end of the week you're not really sure or confident enough to know how many hours you worked on something on Monday, or Tuesday' (Author's Interview with Account Handler, 5.2.M.CS, 19/02/2014). Creatives have to go through a process of remembrance to derive from memory the facts of what was worked. But the portrait of the work they completed is constructed less on what actually took place and all the contingency, chaos and conflict it incorporated, but rather an idealised portrait of the seamless time dictated by the gold standard of the 'time taken' synonymous for our purposes with the category of socially necessary labour time (as set out in Chapter 1). As a creative director at Company 2 said, 'there are periods of time where I can't remember what I've spent and so you guesstimate' (Author's Interview with Creative Director, 11.2.M.CD, 18/03/2014). The guesstimate elides what was, and puts in its place what is valid according to the abstract economic compulsion of the rule of value.

Furthermore, fiction pertains to the way in which hours are chopped and changed as a part of the process of arbitrage encountered in Chapter 9. As one interviewee put it, the process of assigning tasks to juniors or seniors is really just 'allocating time' for the purposes of billing (Author's Interview with Senior Designer, 7.2.F.SD, 25/02/2014). It need not be reflected in reality, as a junior designer steps in for a senior at short notice, recording their hours on another job, and so on. Finally, the rounding up of time spent on a few shorter tasks within any given hour feeds into, over a sustained period of time, only the loosest representation of expended labour, with most workers treating smaller tasks as 15 minute slots regardless of how much the actual amount differed above or below. But, for reasons made clear in Chapter 1, the looseness of this representation need not contravene its expression of socially-necessary labour time, the 'time taken'.

10.8. Conclusion

I will, by way of example, finish with the most extreme case of where a true record of expended labour is dispensed with in favour of a simple reflection of time billed. At Company 6, the designer I interviewed would simply auto-fill their timesheet with the original schedule of hours set out in the budget derived from the amount billed to the client (Author's Interview with Designer, 30.6.M.D, 30/11/2014). This, ultimately, represents the ideal manifestation of the rule of the billable hour, ineffectively imposed by timesheets, technology and human input, but maintained best of all by the simple like-for-like impression of what was there to begin with: the price of the job, its value, and the measure that follows. The 'time taken', the standard of socially necessary labour time. The forms of measure to which these workers are subject are nowhere near crisis. Rather, they proceed entirely without referent, sufficient only to themselves and no other. It is here, ultimately, in an abstraction lived, experienced and manifested practically, that the unresolved problems of measurability are mediated in defiance of any purported crisis.

This account shows that a crisis of measurability is possible only insofar as measure is seen as passively representing something that occurs at a remove from it. But what the account of billable hours suggests is that the conditions of measurability constitute what is measured. The way in which work is measured in the creative industries changes the work itself. It renders it in certain ways that lend themselves to measure. But, moreover, it refers always to the imbrication of what takes place in the sphere of production within a wider nexus of market-mediated relationships of exchange. The measure emits from the latter, and is not dependent on the former. Value's measurability does not live and die on changes incipient to the content of labour itself, but rather functions through the maintenance of social forms mediating that content in conformity with the processes of validation established in and through the exchange abstraction.

By looking at the specific features of creative labour, and the way managers must respond to its relative unknowability and greater ephemerality by implementing novel technological and organisational approaches to control and measure it, we can see more clearly its imbrication in the same webs of capitalist valorisation, domination and exploitation that postoperaist and bourgeois accounts alike suggest it has somehow freed itself from. The example of billable hours outlined in the last three chapters demonstrates this. By pricing work out to clients on the basis of a number of hours that then, via timesheets and computer software, structure, through measurement, the form and content of creative labour, managers ensure that the contradiction is contained and, contrary to postoperaist accounts of the crisis of the law of value, its measure and valuation continue regardless.

CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS OF CREATIVITY AND LABOUR

In this conclusion, I will reflect on how the evidence given in the case study described over chapters 8, 9 and 10 illustrates the issues covered in the first part of the thesis, and tie the theoretical and empirical insights produced over the last ten chapters together under the rubric of a broader political treatment of some of the wider issues and questions that have arisen from my inquiry. I will also, where necessary, integrate further quotes and evidence from the case study, where the topic covered could not be contained within the narrower empirical confines of the last three chapters. These include the possibilities for resistance, the political mobilisation of discourses of creativity, the exploitation to which creatives are subject, and the utopian visions of futures of work and non-work that co-opt the creative industries as a harbinger. All these open up upon bigger questions confronting contemporary critical praxis. They do so around two aspects. Firstly, the politics of creativity: the forms of resistance and political subjectivity possible based on the evidence and testimonies collected in the case studies, and the discourses around the creative industries in both mainstream and radical- for our purposes, postoperaist- accounts. Secondly, the politics of labour: through the prism of an analysis that gives primacy to the social forms assumed by the products of labour, how do we conceptualise a left political praxis that overcomes the paralysis promised in postcapitalist wishful thinking? I conclude by considering this last question, based on the findings of the research reported in this thesis.

The preceding chapters have sought to understand how the ascription of certain liberatory and immeasurably productive powers to work in the creative industries misunderstands where value comes from, as set out in Chapter 1, and what the relationship is between the economic activity that takes place in the sphere of production and the abstract forms of economic objectivity this creativity results in, and appears through, in market-mediated exchange, as set out in Chapter 2.

The empirical case study expounded on in the previous three chapters provides ground to problematize the postoperaist understanding of creative labour as immaterial labour, the concept critically contested over the course of Chapters 4, 5 and 6. As set out in the Introduction, the deliberate use of 'creative labour' to describe the work that takes place in the creative industries situates the activities on which the study focuses within a web of antagonistic social relations of production. This opposes, therefore, the liberatory narratives presented in bourgeois accounts of the rise of the creative industries and the impulses of self-actualisation they are taken to reflect. And it also opposes the resonant discourses present in postoperaist accounts, which envision work in which a multitude self-actualises unencumbered by the capitalistic demands encountered, in, say, industrial factory work.

We began the thesis by noting Boehm and Land's reflections on the debates with autonomist Marxism around value and measurability, and their recommendation for further work on how this relates to the cultural sphere, including the creative industries. As Boehm and Land (2009, pp.76-77) note, artistic and creative labour is generally held to exemplify what Negri and others conceptualise under the banner of immaterial labour. Seemingly divorced in its content and setting from capitalist structures of 'evaluating and measuring labour'- especially, when, like postoperaists, one holds to a traditionalist understanding of how labour and value relate in capitalism- the work of the creative appears to lie 'beyond measure'.

The crisis this precipitates, Boehm and Land write, is 'one of the central problematics of creative capitalism'- in short, 'how is the value of creative labour measured?' Part of the reason that creative labour threatens measurement in this way is its 'apparent autonomy', which, as it appears in the creative industries, acts for Hardt and Negri 'as a benchmark for other creative processes that seem to challenge the logics of

industrial-capitalist organisation'. Of course, this 'industrial-capitalist organisation' plays such a role in the postoperaist imaginary precisely owing to the reductive way in which they analyse capitalism as a whole, as if its functioning reduces to a form of work in a certain circumscribed kind of workplace. Their productivism enables them to place changes in the material form of work as the central point around which all change in capitalism must revolve.

In this thesis, I have subjected to a comprehensive critique the claims of postoperaists around creative labour, immateriality and the crisis of measurability, on both a theoretical level and through an empirical case study. The overall question that guided the thesis was *what does the practice of 'billable hours' in the creative industries suggest about the production of value?* Using the understanding of value as the result of a process of social validation of abstract labour, I have shown that the value of creative labour *is* measurable because it *is* measured. In addition, I asked three subsidiary questions that oriented the analysis towards an answer to the overarching question. These were:

- Based on the evidence in the case study, does immaterial labour create a crisis of measurability in contemporary capitalism?
- Is Marxian value theory still relevant for the understanding of contemporary labour, and specifically that of the creative industries?
- What does Marxian value theory suggest is the role of the creative industries in the circuit of capital, and how does this role impact upon the work that takes place in them?

In positing a crisis of measurability, postoperaist theorists of immaterial labour who seek something quintessential in the work that takes place in the creative industries elide several aspects made clear in the empirical case study. And this in turn, to address the second of the subsidiary questions, demonstrates the continuing validity of Marxian theory in grasping the relationship between labour, value and measurement. Further, where the third subsidiary question is concerned, creative labour's autonomy and spontaneity can be seen only in the context of its continuing imbrication within capitalist social relations of production that imply domination, abstraction, sublation and denial. Ultimately, the social is not constituted as such in and by creative labour performed autonomously and outside capital, but, as we saw in the analysis of how it relates to the sphere of circulation in Chapters 7 and 8, via the normal routes through which the social coheres under the rule of value, which is to say, through the abstraction of labours in the process of exchange and creative labour's relationship to the buying and selling of commodities more widely. Hence, the crisis of measurability posited by postoperaists is contested from the perspective of a continuingly relevant Marxian theory of value. To conclude, I will examine some of the political implications of this analysis.

Postoperaismo: swimming with the mainstream

The celebration of the multitude's spontaneous productiveness and the unencumbered 'creativity of desire' we find in the pages of the *Empire* trilogy dovetails with some of the same ideas through which capital understands itself in popular discourse around the creative economy. The notion that the changes in work reflect the immanent drive of workers themselves to self-actualize through more communicative, cognitive and creative work chimes with bourgeois characterisations of contemporary capitalism popular in the same period as this revision in Negri's thinking occurs. We see a fresh uptake of the same ideas in the present day with a number of bestselling books using a Negrian perspective to sell radical ideas in rational forms to centre-left policymakers around the 'sharing economy' and the move

to a post-work, postcapitalist society (see Mason, 2015b, Srnicek and Williams, 2015b). We will critique these ideas at the climax of this Conclusion.

As we saw in Chapter 4, Negri classifies the working-class capacity to valorise in a 'self-defining, self-determining' way, 'autonomously from capitalist valorization' (Cleaver 1992a, p.129). Negri suggests that it surpasses 'mere resistance to capitalist valorization', amounting to a 'positive project of self-constitution' instead. The activity of the multitude, immanent and not transcendental or contradictory to global order, arises from within the fabric of capitalism as spontaneously organised and autonomous creativity (Hardt and Negri 2001, p.83). This happens not only through the refusal of work- as was the case in the imbrication of self-valorisation in the anti-labour struggles of the Italian 1970s, but actually 'by working' itself (2001, p.395). The multitude, in conditions of extant communism within the capitalist shell of the present can 'produce itself' as a Spinozist 'singularity', through cooperation in the process of *working* (2001, p.395). This production is spontaneous and cooperative beyond the capacity of capitalists to control, capture or measure it.

By linking the capacity for self-valorisation and the 'creativity of desire' to the rise of immaterial labour current at the time Hardt and Negri were writing *Empire*, they steal work from the antagonistic context in which it sits in the theorization of the social factory and instead eulogise the capacity to realise oneself *in* the newly socialized workplace in such a manner as to exceed- in a non-negative, non-antagonistic, non-contradictory and entirely immanent way- the ability of capital to measure.

As Doogan (2009) astutely notes, this kind of post-Marxist wishful thinking about the new world of work ends up being a radical alibi for mainstream accounts of changes in contemporary capitalism. As we saw in Chapters 4 and 5, this Spinozist reading of the self-valorising, self-actualising 'creativity of desire' coincides with mainstream celebrations of capitalist dynamism issued over the same period and since. This becomes painfully clear in how the conceptual apparatus of immaterial labour relates to state and bourgeois discourses around creative industries, creative labour, and the motivations and lifestyles of the workers employed in them.

We can best see the way in which this commonality operates through the discourse of the 'creative class', a concept coined by Richard Florida that has subsequently inspired numerous policymakers (2002). Florida suggests that the 'creative class' is composed of all those 'whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content'. Encapsulated within this category is not only the actual labour that differentiates it, but a *lifestyle*. Florida speculates that where the luxurious bohemian lifestyles of the creative class go, the corporations will follow. But the whole discourse of creative 'talent' that provokes these appeals to regeneration and geographical incentive conceals the fact that it is not the 'creative class' that determines the movements of capital; it is capital itself that ultimately determines the constitution of any such category of worker, albeit not through a crude economic determination, but through an active struggle to recruit cultural workers to its cause.

Creative labour as doing-in-denial

As the case study shows, although there is an invitation to be creative at the heart of these movements, what creative desire the worker has is denied and sublated in the form their activities assume as abstract labour. The creatives in the agencies studied are, for the most part, repressed artists for whom the only liveable outlet for their vocation capable of guaranteeing their social reproduction is the waged sphere of work in graphic design and advertising. This centres on a conflict over time, primarily. As one designer put it, 'we're all artists- we've got no concept of what our time is actually worth compared to other professions', and they largely do not care about external benchmarks of economic worth (Author's Interview with Designer, 6.2.M.D,

19/02/2014). But it encroaches and impinges on them nonetheless. Try as they might to imbue their work with notions of 'beautiful work', their efforts run up against the sublation of these desires in the forms of practical abstraction to which their concrete activity is subject.

The inevitable excess that this produces has yet to attain any significant political subjectivity vis-a-vis the doers of creative labour. Indeed, very often the artistic desires that seemingly conflict with practical abstraction are turned against their holders. Justified by their self-impression as artists as an identity posed against their reduction to creative labour, designers- as 'artists'- 'live off praise, so you don't have to give them loads of money to keep them ticking over', the aforementioned designer told me. He continued: 'Imagine telling van Gogh to go home at six o'clock- he'd tell you to go fuck yourself'. Here the designer's own creative practice constructs and feeds into an antagonistic relation that assumes an alien, dominating existence beyond their control. The very mode of their resistance against the frameworks of measure and the forms of practical abstraction to which they are subject ends up becoming yet another means for that against which they resist. And, as the designer put it 'that's why the creative industries do get abused'. After telling me that, he checked himself, and added: 'No, it's not abuse- we draw pictures all day for a living'. This confusion, the contradictory duality of creative practice as one thing and another, as labour and mode of resistance, the one folded into the other, is thoroughly antagonistic to its core, although seldom with direct expression.

Against this antagonistic context, what the 'creative class' doctrine does is give a positive account of unburdened artistic activity that resonates with Negri's eulogisation of self-valorising creativity, envisioning it as an opportunity for self-actualisation- of liberation *through* work and not against it. Indeed, the rhetoric of the 'creative class' and the policy uses to which it has been put are one example of the ideological environment through which appeals towards this self-actualisation are enacted, inviting the formation of a creative lifestyle that disciplines workers into a totalising relationship with their concrete labour. One designer suggested that designers '*live it*'. But this lifestyle leads to them 'put[ting] in four or five times as many hours as they end up billing for, because they're just into it' (Author's Interview with Designer, 1.1.M.D, 15/01/2014).

As Hesmondhalgh and Baker suggest (2008, p.102), 'self-actualization might serve as a mechanism for control and even exploitation in creative work'. The same cooperative sociality of immaterial labour around which Negri poses the possibility for liberation through work is in fact, the case study suggests, merely the careful institutional construction of a labour process than manages the autonomy necessary to creative production in a way reconcilable with the abstractions requisite for the valorisation process of which it is the carrier. As one participant suggested, being 'submerged' in the creative 'scene', and the 'stimulation and inspiration' gained from others, helps 'force creativity' (Author's Interview with Account Handler, 5.2.M.CS, 19/02/2014). He endowed this with positivity, but the implication is clear: the cultivation of a cooperative sociality in creative agencies does not draw on a pre-existing spontaneous creativity, but 'forces' it. What Negri sees as immanent to the work itself is in fact institutionally circumscribed, dependent on the corporate context covered in Chapter 8. And, moreover, the collective conditions- of communication, cooperation- that for Negri activate the potential for self-actualisation via self-valorisation are, in the case study, precisely those that limit the resources for forms of liberated human practice, and turn human practice against itself as abstract labour. This is a contradiction, and an antagonism, against which the organisation of creative labour and its measurement must work.

The same structures that support this purported self-actualisation fuel the valorisation of the labour-qua-creativity to which it relates, which exists only in a denied form as abstract labour. This domination issues through the creative's own practice, the results of which- commodities, money- determine the forms of measure that rule over it. The value-form flows through even that to which it seems opposed, and the creativity itself becomes socially significant and meaningful only through its monetary validation. The struggles waged by employers to manage this contradiction exposed it, on occasion, to the experience of participants in the study. The introduction of time-tracking software at Company 8 'made prevalent a contradictory situation' whereby 'service provision' is 'dressed up in the fallacy' of 'doing something creative', one designer told me (Author's Interview with Designer, 32.8.M.D, 14/01/2015). There are 'inherent contradictions' in this, the designer noted: 'people can make a lot of money out of you, pay you shit, because you're overwhelmed with this idea that you're going to have this creative freedom'. The promise of self-actualisation here, and the creative practice on which it rests, are actively experienced as subject to an abstraction whereby they are turned against the creative via their objectification in economic categories, aided in their construction by the implementation of technological solutions to the problems of measurability covered in Chapter 10.

What the theoretical and empirical work presented in this thesis suggests is that we should think of creativity in a critical rather than a positive sense, against Negri, and bourgeois thinkers like Florida (2002), whose conceptualisation of a 'creative class' endows creative workers with a fulfilled and liberated labour subjectivity much like that Negri ascribes to the multitude. Here we might usefully draw on Holloway's theory of 'doing' to bring creativity into critical and political relief as a potential and not actual quantity (2002b, 2010).²⁵ The case study, as we have seen, suggests that creative practice is something that takes on a contradictory and antagonistic status in capitalist society, wherein it can be practiced only under the precondition of its induction into the sphere of waged labour. This creates a negative situation for the creative labourer that Holloway's theory helps decode.

The experiences of the designers interviewed in the case study chime with Holloway's juxtaposition of 'doing' or 'power-to' with the rule of abstract labour or 'power-over' (Holloway, 2002b). For Holloway, human 'doing', autonomous collective and individual activity geared toward some useful or pleasurable end appears in capitalist society only in the mode of being 'denied'. The will to be creative can only be expressed as wage labour, in a world where we must work to eat. 'Power-to' (that is, the power to create) is subverted by 'power-over', the dominion of abstract economic imperatives of value and profit (Holloway 2002b, p.45). The creativity in human doing struggles against its subversion in abstract labour, the homogeneous, undifferentiated time of capitalist production, but Holloway shows that creativity - 'doing' or 'power-to' - is something suppressed, denied and struggled for (2002b, p.47). Creativity, then, is treated here as a potential quality that exists but only in the mode of being denied. It can only ever be partly present, what Holloway calls 'not yet' (2002b, p.13). It is around this that any politics of creativity waged in resistance to creative labour must cohere. But the case study uncovered little evidence such a politics was in composition.

This critical stance on creativity differs from a perspective that celebrates creativity as something achievable and enjoyable in capitalist society, and which takes no account of the antagonistic and contradictory relationship between human beings and their 'doing' in capitalist society. Whereas Florida sees creative labour as the fulfilment of creativity, the research presented here shows that the power to create is always in

²⁵ See Pitts 2016c for another iteration of this argument.

conflict with the abstract economic compulsions of capitalist valorisation and profitability.

And these compulsions contain within them material relations of coercion, violence and harm. I have given some examples in the case study chapters, but others abound. One participant, a member of a client services team on a big FMCG account, routinely worked 80-hour weeks, with no extra pay (Author's Interview with Account Handler, 28.2.F.CS, 30/11/2014). A designer at a big advertising firm who was long-term sick with a repetitive strain injury sustained after two 20-hour shifts in a row described a generalised environment of 'burning out' amongst his peers (Author's Interview with Designer, 12.10.M.D, 21/05/2014). A freelancer described how a former colleague had driven his car into an Amsterdam canal, overworked and exhausted (Author's Interview with Designer, 14.FL.M.D, 05/06/2014).

The concept of creativity must be used critically in light of this evidence. We must keep in mind its possible realisation in a world without the constraints placed upon it by capitalist social relations. But this must also leave room for a critique of the conditions of exploitation and domination to which creative workers are subject now (see Gill and Pratt, 2008, and Ross, 2008).

Creative autonomy and control

Thus, creativity in creative labour is not a realised quantity, but a suppressed potential against which its measurement struggles. Creative work is characterised by ephemerality and unknowability.²⁶ The potential success of a creative good or service is uncertain (Caves, 2002) and it is not always possible to observe or measure creative work in progress, for its immateriality makes it hard to quantify (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011, pp.83-84), but, crucially, not impossible. Thus, creative organisations can rationalise their work only to a limited extent and must use other means to overcome the inherent risk and uncertainty of their endeavours. In Chapters 9 and 10, we explored some of the means by which they do so.

Creative autonomy is generally necessary to the effective performance of creative work, according to a romantic conception of creativity as an unconstrained and independent work process. In this conception, creatives use their imaginations in careful, loving undertakings. The creativity essential to many forms of cultural production therefore depends upon the devolution of control over their work to the creatives. In creative companies, however, the creative process is much more controlled, and, importantly, limited.

As Hesmondhalgh and Baker have noted, creative management always 'struggl[es] against the relative autonomy given to creative workers' (2011, pp.83-84), but at the same time, it relies on this autonomy for the delivery of innovative work. There is a fine balance between, on the one hand, the 'freedom to be creative', and on the other, the ability to keep 'creativity within manageable and productive bounds' (Townley and Beech, quoted in Hodgson and Briand, 2013, p.311). Creative projects function not in spite of this tension, but because of it. At Company 4, deliberate steps were taken to implement limitations. According to the production and operations manager, Company 4 is 'far more focused on creativity' than other agencies with which she'd worked,

which is [...] an amazing thing, but with that what my job has been over the last few years is to pull that back a little bit, um, keep that focus but just have it so we're a little bit more accountable, um, because we used to sit a little bit too far the other

²⁶ Some elements of this section appear as Pitts 2016c

way, where somebody might not be working a billable project for days (Author's Interview with Production and Operations Manager, 23.4.F.PO, 21/07/2014)

Over these days, we are led to believe, the designer can follow their creative initiative in an unbilled way. As discussed in Chapter 10, her role was to impose processes that kept this in check. And my interviews at Company 4 suggest this implementation of new constraints on creativity was embraced by those subject to them. As one designer put it: 'the activity really starts where there's limitations' (Author's Interview with Designer, 25.4.M.D, 21/07/2014). Their creativity is denied but what is denied must appear, and can only do so through the forms of appearance available to it. In this context, creatives must go along with the experiences and practices of abstraction their work undergoes in making it commensurate and recognisable against the backdrop of agencies' imbrication in a wider set of capitalist exchange relations. It is the condition for them to be creative at all, in a world where the wage arbitrates our subsistence.

The imperatives attached to these relations place agencies and their creatives necessarily at odds with each other, in some respects. They work to conflicting agendas, with different temporalities and working rhythms. More than one participant emphasised the importance of 'the flow' to their understanding of what it meant to be creative (Author's Interview with Designer, 1.1.M.D, 15/01/2014). 'Logging your hours', one explained, 'is a total pain in the arse, because it's not a natural thing for a creative person to do'. Having to account for your time does not map onto a working rhythm that varies and may travel in multiple different directions, many abandoned, over the course of any given day (Author's Interview with Designer, 26.4.M.D, 21/07/2014). This sense that time-tracking somehow contravenes a 'natural' creative state of course elides the specific waged institutional and material relationship under which creativity can be employed in capitalist society. But the harnessing of a creative identity to a very specific 'rhythm' indicates the extent to which conflicts over the content and form of creative labour are bound up in issues of time and measurement.

In response, as at Company 4, agencies must limit and manage the autonomy and creativity of their employees even while, contradictorily, depending on them. On one hand, this risks infringing the 'flow' central to the designer's vocation. On the other, the risks attendant upon devolving control to creatives must be minimised through the careful management of their creative energies. Checks and monitoring arrangements are put in place in order to contain these seemingly autonomous activities, and to manage these tensions, as we saw in Chapters 9 and 10.

The continuing relevance of value and measure in creative labour

In many ways, creatives appear to inhabit a world of work that is decentralised, relatively autonomous, tech savvy, digitally wired, and nourishing of individual creative freedom. But, contrary to contemporary approaches to new ways of working, most notably that of the immaterial labour thesis, creative work is not exempt from the processes of measurement, abstraction, time discipline and worker control to which labour under capitalism has traditionally been subject. Indeed, it makes these processes more transparent. It also throws light on the market- and money-mediated character of the forms of measure implemented.

To some extent, the clear relationship constructed in billable hours between labour and money renders transparent the real appearances of abstract economic categories. But this is in a particular context wherein the activity measured is taken to defy easy measurement by those involved. Contrary to the ascription of a crisis to measurability made by the postoperaists and their contemporary followers, measurability, in the case study, is notable by its persistence. In spite of the problems it faces, it defers to external benchmarks of value determined in the market.

The constraints and controls placed upon creativity in the labour process- a creativity that reappears, denied, in the forms its product assumes in exchange, or, as we saw in Chapters 7 and 8, in the commodities it helps circulate- relate to this persistence, contrary to the situation described in postoperaist scenarios of a crisis of measurability sparked by the advent of immaterial labour such as that found in the creative industries.

But the case study uncovers the struggles waged to ensure this abstractness. The rule of value is always subject to such a struggle: fragile, incomplete, reliant on forms of practice it must deny in order to thrive. It is on unsteading this balance, perhaps, that any politics of creative labour should centre, and not the assumption of an existing and already-achieved realisation of a future liberation in the present day.

The case study shows that the heterogeneity, ephemerality, relative spontaneity and essential unknowability of creative production and its outputs pose a problem for their management. The exchange of goods and services as commodities depends upon the bringing of all things into a relation of equivalence by means of money. That which is not comparable and commensurable must be rendered so in order to enter into the social relation of value. It is this principle against which creative labour sometimes offends, and that certain modes of regulation manifest to ensure the commensurability of it and its outputs. We saw, in Chapters 9 and 10, the methods by which this proceeds.

But ultimately every intervention eventually must defer to the value abstraction. Indeed, the 'measure' of creative labour can itself be seen to structure the very labour it purports to quantitatively represent. The compulsion to measure is imported from outside, external and in conflict with the wishes of those involved. But the condition of their work, as noted, is submission to the institutional context that makes creativity possible in a capitalist society. The measure mediates these contradictions, whilst the processes of production and valorisation at play thrive from the unsteady balance of autonomy and control.

The set of practices which construct billable hours- the monitoring of time spent working on a particular project, the filling in of timesheets, the totting up of hours to establish utilisation rates- suggest a series of points at which an expected formulation of the eventual validation of abstract labour begins to cohere. And, the case study suggests, they reflect a reality opposed to that postoperaists represent in their characterization of immaterial labour as beyond measure, especially as it relates to work in the creative industries.

But this is by no means a complete and seamless construction. The case study suggests that struggles and tensions ensue around this, pointing towards wider political questions about the status of creative work and the competing demands made upon workers who pride themselves on their creative identity but run up against the constraints of capitalist measurement in the service of the exchange abstraction. In the absence of any organised labour mobilisation in the sector, we have to work to extract meaning from the testimonies given. They suggest the measurement of creative labour is terrain ripe for resistance.

Creativity in revolt?

At the level of the experiences of workers, dynamics of struggle manifest in the creative industries in particular and interesting ways. For instance, they bring the self-understood identities of employees as creative workers into conflict with other dominating logics and rationales. As a strategist bemoaned of completing timesheets, it represents not 'creativity' but '*maths*', the latter a principle not only unrelated but opposed to the former (Author's Interview with Strategist, 8.3.F.S, 26/02/2014).

Another participant offered 'a massive insight into the designer's mind: I don't give a *fuck* about my timesheets' (Author's Interview with Designer, 6.2.M.D, 19/02/2014). For him, it was all about 'the quality' and not its translation into quantity. Against this largely unstated but everyday resistance of those involved, the activities and products of creative industries do not give themselves up so easily to the quantification and commensuration upon which capitalism depends. A struggle is waged to guarantee this, against which creative workers chafe.

This undermines the automatic, neutral appearance assumed by the system of self-monitoring implemented in support of billable hours. The case study, by capturing measurability in the context of a 'crisis' so permanent as to not be a crisis at all (see Chapter 6), highlights the struggle waged by employers to organise the labour process so as to guarantee it, and gained a perspective on the complicity or contestation workers exhibit in response. Billable hours rely upon workers having their eyes constantly 'on the watch' to the extent that they 'think in six-minute intervals' (Alvehus and Spicer, 2012, p.501). In its directly practical and personal existence, billable hours thus have a direct impact upon the everyday life of the workplace, prohibiting through the internal regulation of one's own time frivolities such as unnecessary chit-chat at the water-cooler or in the corridor. Hence, Alvehus and Spicer are at pains to emphasise the overwhelmingly 'quiet atmosphere' of the offices they studied (2012, p.501). Billable hours are not a neutral, natural process but one that is very deliberate, relying upon individual and collective practices, decisions and, moreover, concrete social relations. This is the fabric of practical abstraction- the numerous actions and decisions around time, and speed, and value, that render concrete labour commensurate with the external standard of socially necessary labour time expressed in monetary exchange.

The need to ensure commensurability and measurability in the context of specialised, hard-to-quantify creative labour drives the system of billable hours. In the service of the law of value, which is mediated through the market relationship with client companies, billable hours act as a regulatory mechanism that in turn structures the individual experience of creative labour within the agency itself. This experience produces many tensions and struggles over what it means to be creative and how this can be exercised within the context of business.

As noted by Moor and Julier (2009), part of the reason that billable hours are instituted as a means of control might be seen in the context of a working environment whereby the 'material interests' of the employee may be at odds with those of the employer, not to mention other interested parties such as clients and end users. We have already seen, in Chapter 8 and 9, how agencies find themselves in conflict with clients, as representatives of business imperatives that impinge on creatives' desire to craft 'beautiful work', and the competitive pressures placed on agencies in a crowded sector and unfavourable economic conditions.

There is a popular dictum that 'business people are from Mars, and designers are from Venus' taken to suggest that 'creativity resists quantification' (Lockwood, quoted in Julier and Moor, 2009, p.257). In this, we might say, the resistance to quantification consists in the irreconcilable interests and motives of creatives and the capitalist enterprises with which they collaborate, for whom they work and to whose custom they owe their livings. However, attempts *are* made to quantify creativity, and one should not romanticise the capacity of pure, untrammelled creativity to somehow escape the web of capitalist social relations. One should, as Jeffcut and Pratt recommend (quoted in Julier and Moor 2009, p.257) see creativity not as a natural category but in its complexion as the product of a series of enabling and sustaining processes that are of a far more administrative and organisational character, and

which (arguably) bring the category of 'creativity' into existence by means of its definition, valuation and management.

I was especially struck, for instance, by the dispassionate way in which one participant described the relationship between his work and the time measurement to which it was subject. He considered it part and parcel of his vocation as a designer, having been taught the discipline of deadlines in design school, and thereafter always aware his skill was one engaged usefully and recognised monetarily in the selling of goods and services for businesses (Author's Interview with Designer, 26.4.M.D, 21/07/2014). Contrary to romanticisations of the creative spirit against its capitalist domination, time discipline is not enforced only at the level of the firm, but is also inherent in the particular institutional circumstances under which designers become designers in the first place.

And yet: despite the reluctance to romanticise the resistance of creativity to capture by capitalist social relations, one should also recognise that the attempt to quantify *is* marked by risk and peril, and that this *is* partly due to the struggle between different ethics and outlooks that marks just one of the qualitative frontiers that challenge and delimit the application of categories of quantitative measurement not only to *working* life, but to life itself.

As Toynbee asserts (2013, p.93), claims as to the specialness of creative labour arise partly from a normative challenge to capitalist rationality, however misguided, and for this reason, 'cultural work encompasses an idea about what work in general *could* be like' that we 'ought to take seriously'. However, as Toynbee concedes, the autonomy promised in this idea is restricted to an elite of workers, 'shaped by the domination of capital over labour'. We can therefore retain a critical stance by appraising the potentiality of creative work not as something *already achieved*, but as something that is only *immanent within* the present, with the capacity to fully flower in the future. In order for it to do so, the wage relationship must be broken, Toynbee suggests (2013, p.97), to the extent that creative activity escapes the yoke of payment altogether and eludes its subordination to the logic of capitalist valorisation. Theorisations of the specificity of creative labour under the banner of immaterial labour are a mistaken attempt to get to grip with the dualness of creative activity under capitalism. Politically, what is really significant is, as Boehm and Land (2009, p.95) write, that, '[p]erhaps, culture and the arts are, after all, fairly autonomous zones that will always exist in an ambiguous relationship to society and capital.'

But postoperaist accounts concede too much to the ideological self-impression of capital at a time of economic change. They construct an antagonism-free space where, teleologically, communism is made possible within the shell of capital, workers can self-actualize through liberation *at work* rather than only against it, and capitalism meets its final, inevitable crisis, as foretold in Marx's Fragment (see Chapter 5) whereby valorisation and the measurement upon which it depends breaks down. This is true of Hardt and Negri, who, as Doogan notes (2009), provided a radical cover for the same celebrations of capitalist dynamism found in the pages of *Wired* magazine and a hundred pop-economic bestsellers. Today, the world is abuzz with talk of a postwork future accessed via automation and the sharing economy (see Mason 2015b). The laboratory for many of these changes eulogized on both sides of the ideological divide is work of the kind found in the creative industries. But a close study of the circumstances on the ground in the archetypal example of immaterial labour-creative work- goes to show is that these optimistic visions are confounded by the negativity of reality in capitalist society.

Not Old Labour, not New Labour, but Abstract Labour

I will close with some reflections on what my thesis offers the re-evaluation of critical praxis in the wake of this 'postoperaist turn' and the proliferation of policy agendas informed, if only tangentially, by the faulty prognoses of the Fragment.

What the New Reading of Marx brings to Marx is an understanding of value not as a property that things have, but as a relationship between things. It is a category of social mediation that mediates relations between people as relationships between things and quantities. Value is therefore a social category. This allows us to rethink the critique of political economy. The latter is a critical theory of society, as opposed to a rival economic theory to compare and contrast with Keynesian, or Ricardian, or Smithian economics, for instance. Looking at value as a category of social mediation changes how we also think about the way this relates to what goes on in the world of the workplace. On the one hand, we hear theorists like Negri talk about immaterial labour creating a crisis of measurability. They look at changes in the composition of labour's content and extrapolate from that changes in capitalism, and crises in capitalism. But what the analysis of value as a category of social mediation does is suggest that the immediate form of that labour matters less than the way that the concrete expenditure of labour time is abstracted from, in the exchange of the commodity it produces with all other commodities by means of money.

So the crucial question for this critical strand of Marxism is 'why does this thing or this process take the form it does?' What we should be talking about when we talk about labour is not necessarily the labour itself but the specificities of that labour insofar as it results in a commodity carrying value, expressed in its price. This, after all, is the specificity of capitalism. So in order to understand labour in capitalist society, in its specificity within the social formation in which we find ourselves, we have to understand that. This enters into conflict with the claims made by the postoperaists, about immaterial labour, the crisis of measurability and the potential for an incipient, spontaneous communism to spring from out of the shell of capitalism. And, in changing the way we think about the significance of labour in capitalist society, changes how we think about the *politics* of labour.

In the Introduction, I contended that wrong ways of seeing the world can play into wrong ways of thinking politically about how to change it. Postoperaismo, specifically in the work of Negri, manages to strike a perfect synthesis of the two. Analytically, it sees history pass by only at the level of microscopic transitions in the productive base of society. Sweeping revolutions in capital are taken to hinge on immaterial labour of cognition, communication and creativity. They will eventually deliver us liberation. But in this Negri fails to see the persistence of the perverted social forms its results assume in value, money and commodities. This is because they lack the social form analysis of the New Reading of Marx. They focus as myopically on labour as old-fashioned productivists, despite auspiciously disavowing its politics. In this, they miss what the research reported in this thesis uncovers: the inextricable imbrication of labour and its fortunes within the socially mediated schema of the market.

The political consequences of this consist in a complicity with capitalist vagaries. Whatever form taken by human production becomes not only an explanatory factor. It is eulogised as an example of the free and unburdened 'creativity of desire' that Negri, in pursuit of Spinoza, celebrates. Seeing capitalist production as an expression of the multitude's immanent force, every bump in the road is for the best. This is exemplified today in the many inheritors of Negri's flame, for whom the postoperaist rendering of the Fragment resonates increasingly with what their analysis perceives to be the leading edge of capitalist development. Among the epithets for the various manifestations of current left thinking in which this influence

is wielded are 'postcapitalism' (Mason 2015b), 'accelerationism' (Mackay and Avanessian 2015) and 'Fully Automated Luxury Communism' (Bastani 2015).

This springs from the reception of Negri through successive iterations over previous years. His work wielded an influence on the alterglobalisation struggles of the early noughties (White, 2009) and later the Occupy milieu (Mason, 2011). Today it resounds in the revitalization of a populist politics of hegemony-building around a techno-utopia of automation and basic income (Srnicek and Williams, 2015a and 2015b; see Negri's exchange with the latter in Negri, 2015). In each iteration, we see Negri's 'multitude' recoded as, variously, the '99%', 'the people' and 'networked individuals' (Mason, 2015b).

Uniformly among these torch carriers for postoperaismo, the assumption is shared with Hardt and Negri that work is moving in a generally favourable direction, terminating in a postcapitalist, postwork utopia (Mason, 2015b, Srnicek and Williams 2015b). This literature is gaining mainstream relevance and informing policy debates. Indeed, as problematic as this analysis is, it would not be nearly so problematic were it not for the forms of political praxis it now invites. Today policymakers obsess over automation, technological unemployment and the basic income. Via its media popularisers, Fragment-thinking wields real influence. It falls most on those forces in favour of those on receiving end of capitalist domination. Social democratic and popular left parties sit under its spell. Protest groups too, as evidenced in the demands at a recent march in London: 'Demand full automation, demand basic income, demand the future' (Harris, 2016), mimicking those made at the end of *Empire* (2001, pp.393-411)

But the popularity of these ideas is in inverse proportion to their usefulness. Like Hardt and Negri's original message, they uncomplicatedly place all powers of creation in the hands of people. But this elides how the results of human practice take on forms turned against us in capitalist society. They cast history as unfolding entirely according to our design. But what a critical Marxist analysis tells us is that it might not. We cannot rest on our laurels politically. Contra Pangloss, all is not for the best, and we do not find ourselves in the best of all possible worlds. Proponents of constituent power absent themselves from the necessary negativity to grasp this.

This ideological environment, I suggest, harkens back in no small part to Negri's turn from Marx to Spinoza covered in Chapter 4. It translates Negri's Spinozism into a hopeful assessment of political possibility. To combat this thinking, we must seek to cap it at its source. We must reach back into Negri's theoretical development. Its exposure creates critical resources to remedy the latter's errors and build better praxis, to which this thesis is a contribution.

My thesis problematizes this prospectus on two levels. In the first part, I problematized the claims behind this optimism theoretically. In the latter part of the thesis, in Chapters 8-10, I used an empirical example to support the first mode of problematization, examining the reality that undermines these claims on the ground.

To those Fragment-thinkers hanging their hopes on an incipient postcapitalism springing from the present, and who see in creative industries a template, my thesis says this: In its current form, whatever potential creative labour possesses exists only in denial. The relevance of value theory to the study of contemporary work consists in its ability to throw light on how what goes on in the workplace links into a wider nexus of money, wealth, wage and value. The labour process is merely a bearer of this nexus. Utopian visions restricted to its overhaul alone therefore leave the world as it is untouched.

Wrong ideas about the world can produce wrong forms of human practice in response. As Caffentzis notes, in common with other treatments of the purported 'end of work', postoperaismo generates a stultifying politics that suggests 'capitalism has already ended at the high-tech end of the system' and all there is to do is 'wake up to it' (2013, p.81).

Today, popular analyses celebrate empirical trends in work and economic life in expectation of change. But no substantial critical effort is made to understand capitalism's negativity. But the 'actual conditions of life' (Bonefeld, 2015) that characterise capitalism carry over. A crisis, attended by incipient communism, can be conceived only in spite of this.

Wishing all this away theoretically leads to a strategic impasse for left politics. Postoperaismo's inheritors weld the Fragment to a politics too enchanted with the world that is. They assume too much is right, and not enough wrong. Spellbound modes of praxis result, that rub with the grain rather than against it. Positivity is praised, negativity goes un-negated. Policymakers seize upon the false promise of change the radical left heralds. Continuing forms of social domination rest unquestioned

The dissemination of the postoperaist worldview, I suggest, reduces critical resources for a sophisticated, revisionist Marxism. Too positive about prospects for change, it obstructs confrontation with contemporary capitalism's concrete realities. This thesis suggests that the postoperaismo-inspired paragons of postcapitalism impoverish left politics. We may be better off with the negative dialecticians of the NRM tradition. Through this, we can get closer to capitalism analytically, and further from it historically. The critique of political economy as a critical theory of society allows us to ask: what theoretical imperatives support platforms, such as Negri's and that of the new postcapitalist left, that like to say 'yes'? And, in turn, it poses the question of praxis that Bonefeld identifies: what does it mean to say 'no'? This thesis has given answers to the first of these questions. Further work must be done, in struggle and scholarship, to find an answer to the second.

APPENDIX

Figure 9: List of participants and interviews

Alias	Company	M/F	Position	Place	Date
1.1.M.D	1	M	Designer	UK	15/01/2014
2.1.F.PO	1	F	Production/Operations	UK	15/01/2014
3.1.F.JD	1	F	Junior Designer	UK	15/01/2014
4.1.M.SD	1	M	Senior Designer	UK	15/01/2014
5.2.M.CS	2	M	Client Services	NL	19/02/2014
6.2.M.D	2	M	Designer	NL	19/02/2014
7.2.F.SD	2	F	Senior Designer	NL	25/02/2014
8.3.F.S	3	F	Strategist	NL	26/02/2014
9.2.F.SD	2	F	Senior Designer	NL	18/03/2014
10.2.F.PO	2	F	Production/Operations	NL	18/03/2014
11.2.M.CD	2	M	Creative Director	NL	18/03/2014
12.10.M.D	10	M	Designer	NL	21/05/2014
13.FL.M.S	Freelance	M	Strategist	NL	05/06/2014
14.FL.M.D	Freelance	M	Designer	NL	05/06/2014
15.FL.M.D	Freelance	M	Designer	NL	06/06/2014
16.FL.M.D	Freelance	M	Designer	NL	11/06/2014
17.FL.F.D	Freelance	F	Designer	NL	24/06/2014
18.FL.F.D	Freelance	F	Designer	NL	25/06/2014
19.FL.M.D	Freelance	M	Designer	NL	26/06/2014
20.FL.M.CD	Freelance	M	Creative Director	NL	01/07/2014
21.FL.M.D	Freelance	M	Designer	NL	11/07/2014
22.FL.F.D	Freelance	F	Designer	NL	11/07/2014
23.4.F.PO	4	F	Production/Operations	NL	21/07/2014
24.4.M.M	4	M	Managing Director	NL	21/07/2014
25.4.M.D	4	M	Designer	NL	21/07/2014
26.4.M.D	4	M	Designer	NL	21/07/2014
27.5.M.M	5	M	Managing Director	UK	28/11/2014
28.2.F.CS	2	F	Client Services	UK	30/11/2014
29.2.M.MD	2	M	Middleweight Designer	UK	30/11/2014
30.6.M.D	6	M	Designer	UK	30/11/2014
31.7.M.D	7	M	Designer	UK	14/01/2015
32.8.M.D	8	M	Designer	UK	14/01/2015
33.9.M.D	9	M	Designer	UK	14/01/2015

Figure 10: Breakdown of participant sample

Position	Number
Designer	22
(of which Junior)	1
(of which Middleweight)	1
(of which Senior)	3
(of no specification)	17
Production & Operations	3
Client Services	2
Strategist	2
Creative Director	2
Managing Director	2
Total	33
Of which Male/Female	22/11

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